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OR,

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BY W. J. HAMILTON,

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MOUNTAIN GID, THE FREE RANGER.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEATH VOTE.

A DEEP glen in a mountain region, at the north of the Saskatchewan. A region in which nature has done much in the way of rare mountain scenery, of lofty rock and dazzling waterfall. The home of the beaver, the mountain sheep and the carcajou! The dwelling-place of the grizzly bear and the wolf, and the haunt of human savages, worse than they.

High in air above the level of the river rose the towering peaks of the mountains, clothed in eternal snow. Upon a high rock, jutting out from the mountain side, a man stood alone. A man who was the type of that strange Nomad, the "Trapper of the North-west." Tall and strong, with a long, lean visage, glittering dark eyes and muscular frame, it was easy to see that he was rough-grained and hardy, and used to the dangerous life he led.

Planted upon the rock at his feet, and clasped near the muzzle by his strong brown hands, stood the favorite weapon of the trapper, the rifle. A green cord passed over his shoulder, supporting a large powder-flask, and, crossing it from the opposite direction, but so placed as to bring the stopper upon the same side with the flask, was a bullet-pouch, capable of holding two pounds of ball.

His dress was peculiar, though much in vogue among the trappers. It was of buck-skin, greasy and smoke begrimed, but soft and pliable as chamois-skin. A cape of the same material dropped half-way to his waist, and was bordered by a heavy fringe, as were also the skirts of the hunting-shirt. Leggings of the same material incased his strong legs, and

his feet were shod with moccasins. Upon his head was a cap of beaver-skin, with two tails hanging over the right side, completing his picturesque attire. A black belt surrounded his waist, in which were thrust a pair of those dreaded weapons, the Colt revolver, then first coming into use, and a long knife in a buck-skin sheath.

His face was remarkable, and one that would have distinguished him from the common run of trappers. Bronzed by the wind and sun of his mountain home, there was a look of sturdy self-reliance in it which was observable to the most casual eye. His beard was uncut, and added to the wild appearance of this singular man. His hair, of a dark-brown color, dropped upon his shoulders. His mouth was an index of his character; a calm smile played about it as he stood with one foot advanced and his keen eyes bent into the ravine which lay at his feet—a sort of *cul de sac*, cloven by the hand of Almighty power through the mountain, and which had been worn smooth by the passage of horse and foot at various times, Indians, trappers and buffaloes.

The man, we have said, was alone. No, not quite alone, for at his feet crouched a dog of mixed breed, with his head resting on his paws, following the keen glance of the trapper down the pass, with a look of almost human intelligence. A noble animal, bearing the marks of the two species from which he sprung, the bloodhound and mastiff. He had the clean limbs, small tail, and long body of the hound, and the broad shoulders and square head of the mastiff. When standing erect he was about three feet high, and a dangerous enemy for any man to meet, when the brute in his nature was aroused.

The two figures remained upon the rock, motionless as if carved in bronze, still keeping up the same intent gaze. The point upon which their eyes were fixed was the *debouche* of the cañon, as if expecting some one to appear. Nor were they disappointed, for the clatter of hoofs was heard upon the rocks below, and the head of a horse appeared at the entrance of the pass. Instantly the trapper sunk out of sight behind a boulder, still watching the pass, laying his hand upon the head of the dog to still him, for he had uttered a low growl. That hand which he had learned to obey implicitly

subdued him on the instant, and he lay silent, but watchful.

The horsemen began to file out into the cañon until thirteen men were assembled in the narrow space, a hundred feet below. All were well mounted and armed, and by their reckless riding and fanciful dress, the man on the rock had no difficulty in placing them. They were trappers of the Northwest or Hudson Bay, or had been at some time. All sorts of costume were there, from rich broadcloth to greasy buck-skin. Fluttering knots of ribbon, silver buttons and fringes, bespoke the trapper love of finery and show. What was most singular was the fact that each man was masked closely, the mask painted black, and, though leaving the mouth free, covering the upper part of the face.

"Pizon snakes," muttered the man above them. "Quiet, Bruiser, old man. You'd like to git at 'em, I judge. Keep your seat, though. I'll give you a chance at them one of these days. Oh, yea. Bet yer life."

The band appeared to follow the orders of a superior power, a man of commanding stature, neatly but plainly dressed, and armed to the teeth, who had halted in the midst of the cañon, and appeared to be looking about for something which he needed. At length he seemed to decide, for the trapper heard the order to dismount, and every one sprung from the saddle with the exception of a single person, who remained upon horseback. Looking at him closely, the trapper saw that this was involuntary upon his part, for his hands were tied behind him, and his feet strapped beneath the body of his horse.

"Oh, Lord!" muttered the trapper. "What they going to do with him? I guess he's in a leetle grain the tightest fix you ever see. Waugh! I don't like it."

"Tom and Ned will remain in charge of the prisoner," said the captain of the band, in a tone which reached the trapper. "The rest of you come around me. If you two let that scoundrel escape you shall have the same fate we mean to give him."

"Wait a moment, captain," said the prisoner, in a clear, ringing tone. "You know me, and that I am not a man to shrink from the penalty of my deeds. Whatever punishment

you intend to give me for my faults I can not gainsay, for you have me in your power. But let us have no useless mummary. To your infamous designs at once."

This speech seemed to madden the captain, for he made a quick bound and struck the prisoner in the face with the flat of his hand, so heavy a blow that he reeled in his saddle and nearly fell. Indeed, he would have done so if his feet had not been bound.

"Coward! thief!" hissed the prisoner. "You dare not offer me this insult unless my hands were bound. You do well to insult a man in my position. The black curse fall on you and blight you, blood and bones. May the food you eat be poison and your drink the Borgia's mixture. Oh, that I were free a moment. I would give you work to do, you vile ruffian. Will no one show himself brave enough to kill me and take me out of this coward's power? I will thank him for the deed."

The captain had half drawn his knife when the prisoner was speaking, but, as he uttered the last request he thrust it back into the scabbard with a mocking laugh.

"Upon my word, you have spoken the truth in this instance, my friend. You have earned death nobly by your conduct; but, do you think I will let you die at once? No you shall suffer all the miseries man can inflict upon you."

The prisoner was the only man unmasked, and as he turned his eyes toward heaven the trapper saw his face. It was that of a man not yet thirty, with flowing black hair and beard, a skin soft and white as that of a woman, and eyes dark and mournful. A strange thrill passed through the breast of the trapper as the prisoner looked up, and he clutched his rifle convulsively.

"They shan't kill him if I kin help it," he murmured. "But, what kin I do? The most eternal fix I ever was in, by the trumpet of Gabriel! What a face! He looks like a gal more than a man, only for the whiskers."

"Will you listen to me, men?" said the prisoner, turning his face toward the crowd. "Without knowing what or who you were, a year ago I took an oath which made me one of your number. I joined you because the world had used me badly and I was willing to end my life here, doing no man

a wrong, and living out my life apart from the enervating vices of great cities."

The young man paused and seemed to collect his thoughts.

"Stop his mouth," roared the captain. "Am I your leader or not? Gag the scoundrel."

"No, no, capt'in," said one of the band. "That won't do. I'm a man for fair play, though the devil stands at the door. See here: you let the man speak for himself don't reckon he kin say any thing to change what we mean to do, but, don't let it be said we tied a man's tongue when he was going to be rubbed out."

The trapper on the rock went through the formula of shaking hands with the last speaker in a comical way. Distance making it impossible to shake hands in earnest, he pointed expressively to the bold speaker, touched himself upon the breast, and said: "Shake hands on that, stranger," and laid one broad hand in the other and shook it heartily. This formula seemed to relieve him, for he grinned expressively.

The captain glared angrily at the bold fellow who opposed him, and again laid his hand upon a weapon, but, as the champion of free speech did the same, and did not seem to be in the least frightened by this demonstration, and as a low murmur was rising among the men, the leader thought better of it.

"Nonsense, Ned, I did not expect opposition from you. Will you listen to his insulting speeches?"

"Dunno as I blame him so much," said the man, quietly. "You struck him, and if I do say it, 'tain't a brave act to strike a man with his hands tied."

"I was wrong," said the captain, grinding his teeth. "I am willing to admit it. If we have had foolery enough I think we had better proceed to business."

"My man was too many for the condemned coward," chuckled the trapper. "He had to knuckle down, by jinks! Bully for him!"

They led the horse upon which the prisoner sat, and placed him close to the rocks upon which the trapper lay hidden. The man only said:

"Thank you, Ned; you have saved me from one indignity. Have I leave to speak now?"

"Wait for the questions, Brian," said the man called Ned. "I hope you kan ans'er 'em. They shan't kill you without reason."

The captain, who heard the words, exchanged a meaning glance with some of the men, the majority of whom seemed to side with him in his animosity against the prisoner, and the captain whispered something in the ear of the man who stood next to him. Then, leaping upon a rock facing the men, and with his breast turned full upon the spot where the trapper crouched, the captain spoke:

"Is there any man here who is dissatisfied with the rules of our brotherhood?" he cried. "If there is ~~we~~, let him now speak."

"I am," cried the prisoner.

"I was aware of that," replied the captain, maliciously. "Is there another?"

No one spoke.

"I thought so," said the captain. "In a brotherhood such as this, we can have but one watchword, secrecy. He who breaks our rules does it with his eyes open, for he has sworn by the bloody hand and the sharp knife, by cord, by tree and bullet, that he will keep our secrets well, or failing, die by one of the three, or a worse death, if it is the pleasure of the band. Brothers, I accuse Brian Malcom, a brother of the order, with treachery to the band. Shall I question him?"

"You alone can question," replied the band, in chorus. "We can but obey."

The captain approached the prisoner, and laid his hand upon his breast in a solemn and impressive manner.

"Cease," said Brian, angrily. "I know that you can prove that I would have escaped from you, and that I refused to do your bidding. Is that enough?"

"You confess that you have refused to obey the order of the Grand Commander, when whispered in your ears?" said the captain.

"If you mean that I refused to commit *murder*, then I certainly did," replied the man called Brian Malcom. "My hands at least are undefiled by blood, and if I must die, I can go to my long home without the guilt of murder on my soul. I did not ~~know~~ when I joined your band, that you

were other than a band of gold or fur-hunters, who had found some rich placers, and would keep it a secret from the outside world."

The captain laughed, scornfully.

"Again you are right. I told you that we sought gold and furs, and so we do. But, I forgot to tell you that these treasures are brought to our hands. Again: when you found that we were not exactly what you thought us, you would have escaped?"

"Yes; I am no robber."

"You hear, comrades of the Mystic Tie," said the captain. "He confesses his crime."

"He is doomed," cried the masked band. "Away with him; let him die by knife, cord or bullet."

"Stop," said Malcom. "It is true I would have left you, but it is also true that I would not have betrayed you. While I can take no part in your nefarious work, I consider myself so bound by my oath that your secret is safe with me. If I were allowed to go free I would never trouble you, but retire into deeper solitude, there to live alone."

"Does the man think the Brothers of the Tie are to be gulled so easily?" said the captain. "The first thing he would do would be to betray us to the 'company,' and bring the 'trapping brigade' upon us. We are not such fools as that. Say, brethren, are you willing to risk all you have gained by letting this traitor go free? He will surely betray us."

Contradictory shouts arose, some calling for instant execution, some for imprisonment, and others for letting him go. Prominent among the latter, was the man called Ned, who seemed to be of a better disposition toward the prisoner than most of the band.

"There is but one way," said the captain. "Let it go to the vote. I hold in my hand a hat. You will go to yonder bush and pick leaves. Those who would have him die now will pick a red leaf; those who would spare him a white one. I have the safety of the band at heart and I vote last."

One after the other the men advanced, and dropped each a leaf into the hat, while the prisoner watched them with breathless interest. He was young, and the desire for life was strong within him. He studied the faces of the men as they

approached and voted. Would that man vote "red?" He had done him favors a score of times. Dare this one vote against him? He had saved his life when in the clutches of a grizzly bear. All had voted except the captain, and he turned the leaves out upon the rock and counted them. Six red, six white.

"He is doomed," shrieked the captain. "I vote for leath!"

CHAPTER II.

FOR LIFE OR DEATH.

At the ominous word, a dead silence fell upon the scene. The heart of the man on the rock stood still; he trembled for the fate of the unfortunate young man, who, with pale face, but undaunted mien, sat upon his horse, looking from face to face. He had nerved himself to meet death, and would meet it gallantly. But, there is no man on earth, unless he is debased, who can die without emotion. The more brutish of our kind sometimes die with a laugh or a curse upon their lips, but the thinking man does not plunge recklessly into the Great Beyond.

"Hold on," said Ned. "Keep your seats, boys. I object to this way of business. Tom Dayton, run yer eyes over this crowd and count the heads of the voters. Have you done it? How many?"

"Twelve," said Tom Dayton.

"Juss so; twelve. Now count them leaves. How many?"

"Thirteen

"Aha now don't it look as ef we had a double man somewhar? I kain't git through this blasted old lead of mine, how twelve men voting on the square, kan make out thirteen votes."

"Devil!" hissed the captain, drawing a pistol. "Take that."

The pistol was leveled, but Ned made a sudden leap, and

kicked the weapon out of the hand of the captain. It flew into the air and exploded, and quicker than thought, Ned pulled out his own weapon, and leveled it at the head of the captain, who uttered a savage curse and shrunk back.

"Now, look here, boss. I'm a quiet man, but I won't stand to have pistols drawn on me for nothing. That ain't mountain law. Fight fair, whatever you do. I would, ef I was you. The boys won't none of 'em stand by and see the Growler put on by nobody, capt'in or no capt'in. Understand me: thar ain't no man in the mountains more ready to stand by our rules than I be. But no cheating; not ef we knows it."

"Traitor!" hissed the captain.

"Traitor? You lie! I'm a true man, but I stand up for fair play, and fair play I will hev, or I'll know the reason why. See here: we'll vote ag'in, and I'll hold the hat, and every one must show his hand afore he plays it."

The man on the rock again shook hands with the speaker in dumb show and applauded noiselessly.

"That's a credit-mark for you, my lad, a long credit-mark. I'll put it down. An' when the time comes when I'm the man to root out this infarnal gang, I'm the chap as will see that no harm comes to you. That's as good as ef I swore it," he muttered. "Wah!"

The tableau was exciting. In the center of the two parties, who began to pair off and look at each other ominously, stood the horse of the prisoner, close to the rock. The trapper raised his head and looked about him. If he could only get near enough to the prisoner to cut him loose, unseen by the wild band, he might escape. But how could it be done? His eye fell upon a dark cleft in the rock, overgrown by thick foliage, which led downward to the cañon. Could he descend that way? He knew his danger well. It might be the lair of a "grizzly," or it might be alive with rattlesnakes.

His was not the heart to hesitate long when the life of a fellow-creature hung in the balance; so, laying down his rifle, and patting it to show that the dog was to remain and watch it, he threw off his powder-flask and shot-pouch, which would only be in his way in descending into the crevice, and placed them beside the rifle, keeping only his knife and pistols. He

then drew his belt tighter, and, grasping the rock with both hands, slipped down into the crevice and lowered himself until his feet struck a projection upon which he allowed them to rest.

Without removing his hands from the ledge above, he looked down and saw that the shelf upon which his feet rested was barely six inches wide, but that it ran downward, in a sharp angle, to the bottom of the crevice. How deep that rift in the rock might be he did not know, for, although he had passed over it, he had never explored its depths. It might run down into the bowels of the mountain for three hundred feet or more for aught he knew.

"Wah," muttered the trapper. "It's for a life—for a life. Mebbe the boy's got a mother waitin' for him at the clearin'? Who knows? 'Tenny rate, I like his face, and I'll try my best to save him. What ef the old mountaineer gets rubbed out? Nobody will mourn for him except a faithful fool of a dog. Here goes."

Releasing his grip on the rock above, he cautiously began a descent. His body seemed to glue itself to the smooth face of the rocks. His fingers dug into the crevices, and clung to every projection with desperate strength. He knew what a fall meant from that perilous height—swift and sure destruction.

Though brave, he was not foolhardy, and every step was taken with caution. He never let go the projections to which he clung with both hands at once, but sent one hand out as a feeler to see what he should cling to next. He never set his foot down firmly until conscious, by the sense of feeling, that the place upon which he set it was sufficient to support him. Inch by inch he climbed down the inclined plane, and found the darkness growing denser at every step. Perhaps after all the crevice did not lead into the canon? Yet, it seemed hardly probable that it went down into the earth. The voices seemed nearer, too, and that gave him courage.

After proceeding in this way for fifty feet or more, the ledge began to widen, and he was in less danger of being crowded off his insecure path. He breathed more freely, and advanced at a slightly increased speed, hearing the voices grow louder as he came on, and a faint glimmer of light in

front warned him that he was approaching the cañon. A look of joy irradiated the hitherto impassible features of the trapper, and he stopped to listen. He could make out the voice of the captain.

"Do you mean to say that you will fight in defense of this traitor, Ned?" he said, in a voice which sounded strangely hollow to the man in the crevice.

"I don't say that," replied Ned. "But this is what I does say. You put it to a vote ag'in, and see how it comes out. Mebbe it was one of our boys that voted twice for letting Brian go. I don't say it *was* or that it *wasn't*. All I want is a fair show fur a man in a heap of trouble. I ain't got no animosity ag'in' this young 'un; not a bit. I believe, honest and true, that he's sick of our ways and wants to leave us. I believe, too, that he won't tell a word about us if we let him go."

"Nonsense," replied the captain. "Is it natural, now, knowing the treasure we possess, that he can keep his hands off it? He'll lead the trapping brigade upon us the first thing."

"But he don't know our secrets really," said Ned. "He's only an outside guard, and never penetrated the deeps of our mystery, or entered the chamber of the Mystic Circle."

"That is true," said Brian. "Your true secrets are as much a mystery to me as when I first joined you, and if I knew them all, I would not reveal them, for I am bound by an oath."

"This is utter foolishness," said the captain. "Well, be it as you say. We will vote again, and I will prepare the ballot. Tom Dayton, let me speak to you a moment."

There was a dead silence, and the trapper began to advance again. The ledge upon which he walked widened more and more until he no longer found it necessary to cling to the wall. As he removed his hand and took a step in the darkness, he found that the path no longer tended downward, but was level as a floor. A gleam of light broke through the lashes in front and made this floor just visible. At this moment a sharp hiss soiled in his ears, and he took a backward step in dismay.

"Cussed be Canaan! What's that? Bears, buffler and snakes, that ain't purty!"

Straining his eyes to penetrate the darkness, he saw something lying in the midst of the band of light just in front. As he gazed, the object passed slowly outward, and he followed with a cautious step, when it stopped, and a jarring, rattling, metallic whirr sounded in his ears. It could be but one thing on earth, a rattlesnake.

This brave man had a failing. He would face a wounded buffalo, or fight a grizzly upon his native mountains; would try conclusions with an Indian or a hostile borderman, or dare any and every danger except one, and this one he had met. The rattlesnake, or indeed any species of snake, he feared more than any earthly thing.

"Consarn it," he muttered. "Now that's jest my luck. That pesky snake wouldn't git in nobody's way but mine."

He retreated and looked at his enemy in utter dismay. The rattlesnake had thrown himself into his coil and lay with head slightly raised and tail gently waving, emitting at times the strange rattle which the trapper had heard.

"Thar! I've fou't a kinds of created critters, from an Injin down, and now I'm going to be gobbled by a snake. Oh, git away, do! What in natur' do you want to git in my way fur? Git out, you pizon critter, do! I ain't got nothing to say to you, I judge."

The snake lay in the same position, and the trapper began to get angry. Stepping back a pace his feet struck something which lay on the floor. At first he bounded back, thinking it another snake, but as he did not hear the warning rattle, he thrust out his foot and touched the substance again. It was a long, lithe pole which had fallen into the crevice in some way, and he grasped it with a feeling of intense joy, and was about to advance upon his slimy enemy when it occurred to him that while he might beat the life out of the reptile easily, he must make noise enough to call the attention of the band to his whereabouts. Quick to act, he pulled off his belt, and, laying the buck-horn handle of his "bowie" along the end of the pole, he wrapped the belt again and again about it, until it was strongly fastened in its place, when he drew the buckle tight.

"Now, mister, mister, ~~mister~~ snake, I judge you ar' going to git rubbed out," he thought. "Blast the varmint, anyhow!"

Taking two or three steps in the direction of the crotalus, the reptile again threw himself into his coil, and lay sounding his rattle defiantly. The trapper thrust forward the hastily constructed pike, and, watching his time, sliced the head of the serpent from his body, leaving the two parts bouncing about in mortal agony.

"Ugh!" grunted the trapper, with a look of repugnance. "I'd like to dance a war-dance over you, I would! Darn the knife; I'll hev to clean it afore I kan use it ag'in, and I'll never eat meat cut with it till Gabriel toots his horn."

Hastily unstrapping the knife, he thrust it again and again into the earth of the floor, and then returned it to the belt, which he had again strapped about his body. Then, slightly stooping and keeping his ears open for the companion of the slain snake, he advanced cautiously, until he reached the low bushes through which the light streamed, and, peeping cautiously through, saw the prisoner within reach of his hand! A thrill of joy passed through his frame. He drew his knife with a cautious hand, and waited his time.

The sage bushes in front were so thick that it was impossible for the band to see behind them. It was evident the bandits either knew nothing of the existence of the cavern or cared nothing about it, never dreaming of a man lurking in that covert. As he peered out he saw the band divided into groups, all of them at some little distance from the place where he stood, conversing eagerly. The man called Tom Dayton was talking with the captain apart from the rest, and the leader was evidently laboring hard to convince him that he should vote for the death of Brian.

"I don't think he ought to die, captain," said the man, who was stout and dark bearded. "I can't see my way clear."

"But, I tell you he will betray us."

"I don't think it, captain. Now, look here: that boy saved my life in this same Dead Man's Gulch." It seems mighty hard to go back on him, after that."

"If a rattlesnake gets in your path, what would you do?"

"Run like the devil!" thought the trapper, who could hear what these two said, though the others were further away."

"Crush it," replied Tom Dayton.

"Yes. Such a serpent is in your path now, although you

do not know it. I shall find a way to touch you yet. This man saved your life, you say. Why? Because he had no object in letting you die. But do you think he would have saved you, if he could have made any thing by your death?"

"I don't know, captain. I rather think he would," replied Tom.

"I never saw a more obstinate fellow in all my life," said the captain, angrily. "I tell you that this man is your enemy now, even if he saved your life then. I know something which you think a secret. You love Azalia, the beautiful child. I will whisper something in your ear. While Brian lives, she will never care for you."

"Ha!"

"Have I touched you, then? I am telling you the truth. I have better plans for my daughter than to marry a half-hearted fellow like this. Curse him, he is squeamish. He is afraid to take a share in the work of the band. Brush him aside as you would an insect which troubled you."

"Do you mean that if Brian dies by my vote, you will speak a good word for me to your daughter?"

"I had as lieve speak for you as for any of the band," said the captain, with apparent candor.

Dayton reflected. It would seem that the bribe was a great one, for he struggled hard between his desire for the girl and feelings of gratitude to the man who had saved his life.

"Azalia!" said the captain. "Think of what you refuse."

"I have decided," said Dayton, with a hang-dog air. "To the vote again. I believe as you say, that he is my rival with Azalia."

If the man could have seen the look of diabolical cunning upon the face of the captain he would have refused the desired vote. But, the mask was Brian's enemy, and concealed the play of feature from view. They came back, and the captain called the band together.

"Who shall hold the bat?" he asked.

"It don't make much difference," replied Ned. "Ef there should be more than twelve votes we won't stand it."

"Will you abide by the decision?"

"Cert'in," said Ned. "It can't be more than a tie vote, you know. That will give the boy a chance to clear him-

self. 'Tain't fair, anyway, to vote on it when half the band are gone; but, it's the rule, so here goes. Let each one as he votes speak out and say how he votes. Hold the hat yourself, capt'in. I vote:—for life."

"For death!" cried the captain, as he dropped the leaf.

Each man as he advanced spoke that word—either "life" or "death." All voted except Tom Dayton, who came slowly forward, with his hand tightly closed, not daring to lift his eyes. A breathless pause succeeded. Brian kept his gaze fixed steadily upon the shrinking form of the man, and tried to catch his eyes, but he obstinately refused to raise them. Twice his hand approached the hat, and as many times he drew it away. The captain stooped and whispered a word in his ear. He started as if stung by a serpent, and shouting, "for death," flung the fatal leaf into the hat, and fell to the earth, covering his face with his hands.

CHAPTER III.

THE PRISONER'S ESCAPE.

THE die was cast; Ned could aid the prisoner no more. Brian did not speak, but sat upon his horse with his eyes bent upon the figure of the man whose vote had sentenced him to death, and who lay groveling in the dust with all the agony of a lost soul. He knew that, in all gratitude and honor, he should have saved the life of the man who had done as much for him, but, the bribe which the captain had held out was too great, and he had yielded. Now he would have given worlds to have recalled his vote, but it was impossible. He could not bear to feel that the eyes of the prisoner were bent upon him, with a look of mingled sorrow and reproach. He had not looked up, and yet he knew that Brian was looking at him. —

"Take him away!" he shrieked. "I can not bear his look. His eyes seem to burn into my brain, and I shall go mad—mad!"

"Do not be a child," said the captain. "You have done what you should, and we will now end this traitor's career. He shall know what it is to betray his trust."

"No, Giles Markham," said the prisoner, "I shall not die without telling these men that it is not because I am a traitor that you seek my life. I know you too well for that. There is something in my face which makes your life a hell to you, though what it is I can not tell. You have hated me ever since my joining your band. It was an evil day when I did so, and linked my fate with robbers and murderers."

"You hear him, men!" said the captain, and they saw him catch his under lip, which showed below the mask, and gnaw it fiercely. "He dares to villify us, foul-mouthed dog that he is! Let him say what he has to say as quickly as he can, and then:—the doom we give him shall not be long delayed."

"Ned," said Brian, turning to the man who had stood his friend, "I thank you, and through you the men who have backed you, in the unsuccessful attempt to save my life. I thank you, too, that you have sufficient faith in my honor and my respect for a solemn oath to believe that, if set at liberty, I would have kept my faith. And, after I am gone, when you sit beside your camp-fire—and I hope you will one day lead a more honest life than this—you will think kindly of poor Brian Malcom, and his early grave."

Ned turned his head aside and was observed to brush the sleeve of his hunting-shirt across his eyes in a suspicious manner, and then he walked away. Brian smiled sadly, and again looked at Tom Dayton, who had risen and was standing in a dogged manner a little apart.

"Tom," he said.

The man started as if struck by a bullet. The voice of his victim was not angry, only reproachful and sad. The man kept his face averted, and would not look at him.

"I am glad I saved your life once, Tom, but it cuts me that you should be the man to doom me to death. I forgive you, and would like to shake hands with you before I die. I can not believe you can think calmly of this, or be at ease when the memory of this day returns to you in the days to come. Will you shake hands?"

"No," screamed Tom. "I have the guilt of your innocent blood upon my soul, and do you think I could take your hand? Curse you, oh, curse you, Giles Markham, for you have enticed me to do a deed which will make me sleep on thorns while I live! I am in hell—in hell!"

"You brainless idiot, will you spoil all?" whispered the captain. "Can such talk save him? Besides, speak another word of that kind and Azalia shall hate you."

"I am bound to a stake," muttered the unhappy man, "and I can not go back. Let me go, Giles Markham! I can not stay here and see him die. Let me go, or I will cut his bonds with my own hands, though you shoot me dead the next moment."

"Bah! you are a fool. Go, if you so much desire it, though it should be a joy to you to see the death of a traitor."

Dayton turned eagerly, selected his horse from the crowd of trained animals, and, springing into the saddle, galloped wildly down the pass, followed by a fervent anathema from the lips of the hidden trapper, and derisive shouts from his own companions.

"Now, Brian Malcom, for you," said the captain. "I give you a choice of three deaths, by knife, cord or bullet."

"Let me die like a man," replied the youth. "Detail a firing party of as many as you like, and let them fire at the word. I am ready when you are."

"Good," said Markham, rapidly designating four of the party to fire, and among the rest, "Ned, the Growler."

"No, no," replied the man, shaking his head. "I will do no such murder. Do your own dirty work."

"I shall make you repent this, some day," cried Markham. "As you like, though. I will take your place, and I am not as likely to miss him as you are. Stay where you are, Brian Malcom, and meet your death. Start the chant."

The whole party formed in double file, and marched past the prisoner like soldiers on review, with their rifles in the hollow of the left arm, the firing party on the inside. They marched on to form in line a score of paces distant.

Then, a long arm was suddenly thrust out of the bushes, and

the young prisoner felt the cords drop from his hands. Another quick motion, and his feet were so nearly free that by a slight effort he could sever the cords. Taught by experience in danger, he did not move his hands or feet.

"Go, for your life! Turn to the right at the first branch of the pass and look out for me!"

Touching his horse with the point of the knife left in his hand by his deliverer, he was off like the wind, heading toward the pass through which Tom Dayton had disappeared! Markham uttered a cry like that of a wild beast, and hurriedly leveled his rifle and fired. But, those who know how to use a rifle, know, too, that it is a hard thing to hit a horseman at full gallop. Besides, the young man was a finished rider, and had thrown himself over the side of his horse, clinging to the pommel of the high saddle with one hand, while the other was waved in derision at his foes. Two or three more shots were fired before he gained the pass, but none of them touched him, and a spur of the mountain hid him from view.

"To horse!" shouted Markham. "Curse you, Ned, you deserve a bullet through your brains for laughing. He will escape if we do not ride hard."

They ran for their horses, mounted in hot haste, and went thundering down the pass, while the trapper, emerging from his hiding-place, rolled upon the earth in a paroxysm of silent laughter, holding his sides and kicking up his heels like a boy let loose from school. This lasted but a moment, and then, darting at the rugged side of the pass, he went up like a cat, leaping from rock to rock, clinging to tree, bush, and projecting points of granite until he reached the platform where he had left the dog. The animal lay there in silence, close beside the weapon he had been left to guard. It was evident that he had not left the spot where he had first lain down, though nearly an hour had passed.

"Good dog; true and tried," said the hunter, caressing him. "There they go, neck or nothin', and the devil take the hindmost. I laff; I do, by gracious! I laff h'arty. Come, Bruiser; let's try how *we* can go."

Snatching up the rifle, the trapper bounded across the crevice into which he had descended with so much toil, and

which had served him so well, and struck into a rocky path leading across the foothills. His manner of running was peculiar—a sort of lope, borrowed from the Indians, with whom so much of his life had been passed. A tireless, ceaseless tread, which laughs at distance or fatigue. He had kept that pace without rest three weary days and nights, taking food without pausing in his onward course, only stopping now and then to drink from some mountain spring on the road from Selkirk to St. Louis. On he went, the good dog bounding by his side, listening now and then for the rattle of hoofs upon the rocky path, and the wild shouts which told that the bloodhounds clamored upon the trail of Brian Malcom.

"They shan't drag him down ef I kin save him," said the trapper. "Courage, courage! Ef he turned into the pass where I told him, he must pass me when I reach the Chief's Galch. It's a long ride and a dangerous one, but his horse has got good blood, or I know nothin' of hoss flesh. Come on, Bruver. We are workin' for a human critter's life. Think on that, old boy!"

The dog appeared to understand him, and rushed on, half frantic, to all appearance, to be of use to his master. Leaving them to pursue their rapid course, let us see how Brian Malcom fared in his race for life.

When he felt that keen knife sever his bonds, and clasped the trusty steel in his strong hand, he was a man again. It had been hard for him to feel that he must die with bound hands, by the rifles of that murderous band, and hope sprung up in his breast with a great throb as he started the mad steed down the pass. He knew the horse which bore him, a tireless beast, descended from those famous steeds with which lie Leon and De Soto, those unfortunate dreamers, stocked the Western plains in the days of Spanish chivalry. A noble black, with but a single spot of white upon his glossy coat, and that a white ring above his left hind hoof. A horse which had been reared in the free air of the prairie, among a hundred others of his breed, of which he was the flower. Bit nor bridle had touched him until he was pulled down by the lasso of a Texan, and broken to the saddle by the cruel bit and spur. He seemed wild now, as, with distended nostrils and erected mane, he dashed over the stony road, under

the guiding hand of his master. He seemed to know that all depended upon his speed, and he had learned to love the hand which had fed him, and from whom he never received a blow in anger. On, on, the air of the mountain pass singing past them, the old cliffs around echoing back the sound of the flying hoofs.

"Good horse; brave Abdallah!" cried Brian, who was now wild with excitement. "On, on! Serve your master nobly, as you can do. They are in the saddle now; I hear them. Away!"

The rocks seemed to fly past them, but not far in the rear he could hear the roar of pursuit. Brian knew that only two horses in the land could keep up the pace at which they were going long, and that one of these was the horse of Giles Markham, and the other that of his lieutenant, a ruffianly half-breed, who had deserved death a thousand times by his dreadful crimes. The horse of Markham was a thoroughbred of wonderful power, from an imported horse on one side and an American Morgan on the other. Better blood never trod the earth. The horse of the half-breed was of the same herd as that from which Abdallah had been taken, and was nearly his equal. Indeed, in a mile race, he might have kept neck and neck with that noble horse, and in a half-mile race could beat him. The same might be said of the thoroughbred of Markham. They were closing on him fast, and as Abdallah turned an angle in the pass, the head of the English horse could be seen coming into view, and close upon his flank, pressing rapidly forward, the prairie steed of the half-breed. In his headlong course, the hunted man did not see the narrow entrance to the pass he should have taken until he had passed it half a dozen lengths, and it was too late to return, for not a hundred yards now separated him from his tireless pursuers. Without drawing bridle, he dashed on, casting a backward glance over his shoulder. The pass was now straight on for half a mile, and scarcely a hundred yards in the rear thundered the pursuers, their eyes blazing fiercely through their masks. The bloodhound instinct of both was in full tide, and each was eager to outstrip the other in running down the human prey. The rest had fallen far behind, and it was only these alone. But, they were armed with ride,

knife and pistol, and he had only the weapon given him by the trapper. He must depend upon the swiftness and endurance of his steed.

Eighty yards behind came the two pursuers, curses on their lips and murder in their hearts. Their long Mexican spurs were red with blood. In this they had the advantage of the escaping prisoner, who was never a cruel rider, while the flanks of the other horses were scarred by repeated spurring.

With set teeth, laboring breath and eager eyes, the young man urged his brave horse forward. If he should stumble on the rocky path, it was death to his brave rider. Once or twice he felt inclined to turn and face his enemies, and, at the least, die fighting. He had said that if he died no one would mourn him, but he was wrong. He remembered the beautiful face for whose sake he was in such deadly peril, and he knew that she would weep, and had wept for him. What would be her fate, among these savage men, if he were taken from her? He could not, would not die, while there was a chance of salvation.

Glancing again over his shoulder, he became conscious that the relative position of himself and pursuers was unchanged during the last five minutes. If any difference there was, it was in his favor. He began to hope that the superior endurance of Abdallah was beginning to tell upon the others. The mustang of the half-breed was nearly a length in front of the thoroughbred, going at a speed which could not last. The foam was flying in great flakes from his open mouth and changing his black coat to another color. A hope sprung up again in the bosom of Brian, and he touched Abdallah with the point of his knife and called to him. The brave steed responded, and increased the distance between himself and the pursuers, while their frantic shouts and spurring did not seem to increase the speed of their horses. Brian shook his hand exultingly in the air, and turned aside into the right-hand pass, which, though narrower, was smoother than the cañon he had just left.

On each side,

"Aloft and wild,

Uge crags and toppling cliffs were piled,"

up which it was impossible for a man to climb. Why

does the young man pull hard upon the rein and cast a despairing look behind him, and grasp his knife with the gripe of despair? There, a hundred yards in front, stretching itself out to a width of twenty feet, and spanning the width of the pass, is such a crevice as that into which the trapper had descended to his rescue—a terrible barrier to a horse upon which he had called for such fearful exertion during the last few minutes. He reined in, while Abdallah snorted wildly and tugged upon the rein, and surveyed the scene. It looked hopeless. He could not tell how far that black chasm extended into the heart of the mountain; but, behind the clamor grew louder, and he knew that he must decide quickly. Up to the verge of the gulf, the hard bottom of the pass was level as a floor and he might make the leap. After all, it was death in the chasm or death by the hands of his enemies. He chose the only chance.

Heading Abdallah for the rift, he looked back and saw the eager pursuers close upon him. Calling to his horse, he bounded on. They did not know of the chasm until they saw him start, and then they dashed wildly on, just as Abdallah reached the verge. They saw him rise gallantly to the leap, and fly through the air like a great ball, bearing upon his back his undaunted rider. He had not trusted his horse in vain, and, with a shout of joy, felt him strike with a sure footing upon the other side. He was saved!

CHAPTER IV.

GID GRANGER'S HOME.

As he made that fearful leap, he heard a wild, exultant cry, and raising his eyes, saw a man standing on a rock above him, waving his hat over his head. By his side was a huge dog, rising on his hind feet and peering down at the wild scene below, with the air of a creature who thoroughly understands the whole affair. He answered his master's shout by a joyful bark, and capered about on the rock in an insane manner.

It was the Mountain Scout, who had come to the aid of Brian again.

He began to descend the mountain side, with his rifle slung across his shoulders by its strap, and was rapidly nearing the level upon which Abdallah stood panting, when a strange tragedy was enacted below. The half breed, knowing nothing of the ground, could not tell how wide the chasm might be, or else he had lost control of his horse, for he galloped madly on, without drawing rein, toward the gulf over which Brian had leaped.

Perhaps it was the spirit of emulation which the noble animal is often seen to show, which prompted the mate of Abdallah to dare the same peril. However that may be, he came on, with foam-flecked breast and heaving flank, to try the perilous leap. The old mountain man paused, and brought his rifle to his cheek, patting the breech lovingly.

"Let us see him try to make the jump, Bruiser, that's all. Skip all my first wife's relations, ef I don't give him a pill. Yes I will, by gracious. An' this pill won't do him much good nyther. Contrarywise, it mout set hard on his stummick. Oh, no; I guess not."

As the black horse neared the verge, Brian Malcom leaped from his saddle, holding his glittering knife in a firm clasp, and braced himself for a blow. It seemed that the half-breed would have pulled in now if possible, for his reins looked like bars of steel. But, the horse was mad. He rose to the fatal leap, but it was a futile effort. His iron-shod hoofs just touched the other bank, and, with a wild neigh of terror, like nothing earthly, he fell back into the blackness of that deep pit. They caught a glimpse of a white, horror-stricken face, heard a scream of mortal agony, and horse and man were gone. The crash of broken branches told when they struck the tree-tops, growing out of that dismal place, and then, silence—the silence of death.

Brian Malcom, sick at heart at such an unexpected and awful deliverance, sunk upon one knee, and rested his hand upon the rock to keep himself from falling. A mortal sickness seemed to have taken possession of him for a moment, but he became a man again, as the thunder of coming hoofs announced the approach of Giles Markham. He drew rein

upon the black verge, wheeling his horse sharply to the right, at the same time drawing a pistol from his belt.

"Wretch," he screamed. "You have entrapped my friend to his death. You shall die, after all."

"Not just yet," said a quiet voice. "Who talks of dyin'?"

Markham turned and saw the trapper standing on the rock, with a quiet smile upon his face and his rifle laid against his cheek. Giles Markham turned pale as death, for he recognized the mountaineer and knew his deadly aim.

"So it's you, Gid Granger, who dare rob me of my victim?"

"Bet your life," replied the trapper. "That identikle old catamount is rairin' and chargin' over the mountain top. Me and my derg, Bruiser."

"Suppose I refuse to give up my man, what then?"

"Suit yourself, old hoss. But, by the grapes in Canaan's land, ef you don't drop that shooter quicker than 'seat,' I'll drive a hole clean through you. Yes, I will. I'll bore you all *full* of holes. The winds of the mountain will whistle a tune through yer pizon carcass, right smart, I tell ye."

Markham knew his man, and that at the distance between them he could pick out any button on his coat with a rifle-ball. He dropped his weapon.

"Now, look hyar, hoss," said Gid. "You *git*, that's all I say to you—*git*! Don't stand on the order of yer goin', but *git*. Ef it wa'n't a murder, I'd let ye hev one, plumb."

Markham turned and headed his horse the other way. The demon was at work in his heart, but he said not a word. Once he hesitated as if he would have turned back to end the matter there, but the danger was too great, and with a muttered curse, he rode away, leaving Gid Granger master of the field. He climbed rapidly down the rocks and approached the crevice, and kneeling on the verge, looked down. A terrible place. Three hundred feet below a little stream flowed over a rocky bed, the head-waters of one of the tributaries of the Saskatchewan. The pines which grew below, though monarchs of their race, did not reach half-way to the surface. In one place he could see that the branches were splintered, where the body of the half-breed had passed through, but he could see neither horse nor man. Gid rose and measured the distance with his eye from verge to verge, muttering to himself

Then he turned back, without looking at Abdallah, passing his hand carefully over his swelling muscles and broad breast with the manner of a connoisseur. Then he turned to Brian and extended his hand.

"Thar, stranger, I cave!" said he, as he shook Brian's hand heartily. "I thort I could ride, but, by gracious, I'd rather fight both them chaps with my bare hands than to jump *that* crack. Them's my sentiments, and I don't keer who knows 'em. It's a good deal fur a man to say that comes from an actyve fam'ly like mine. I ain't a baby, but I'm weak; I'm powerful weak, compared with my ancestral race. My father could outjump, outswim and outlive any man on the S'katchewan. I know it. He wouldn't make no bones of jumpin' over that crack in a runnin' jump. But on a hoss! Oh, Lord, no, he couldn't do it. I'm pesky proud to know yer; I am, by gracious."

"I have much to thank you for, my friend," said Brian, shaking his hand again and again. "But for you, my life must have been sacrificed by this brutal man. While there is life and strength in the body of Brian Malcom, both are at your service."

"Oh, go 'way! Don't be foolish now. In *course* I ain't sorry to hear yer say that yer glad I helped yer. What else could I do? Thar I was, and thar you was, tied up like a dorg, and me with a knife in my hand. I couldn't do less than cut yer loose."

"Where were you hidden, and how were you able to reach me?"

"Waal, these yer cussid mount'ins are full of cracks like this. Thar was a crack run down to the level of the big cañon, and I crawled down that."

"Is it possible?"

"Tain't much to do. I'm a nat'ral coward, myself, but of a man can't do a little thing like that for a feller human, he ain't no great shakes, I allow. I crawled down to the level an' thar I met an enemy wuss than Blackfeet. Wah!"

"What do you mean?"

A snake; a big rattler. A pesky, slimy, crawlin', pizon sarpint. A black, onnateral villain, with teeth on him an inch long. He nigh about drew me back."

"A rattlesnake."

"Bet yer life. He war a snake, too, and no fool of a one. Nigh about seven feet long, with a head on him like my fist, and my fist ain't no common bunch of bones nyther, an' a rattle as long as my hand. Whirr-r-r-r! he sez. Ugh! Durn them snakes; I hate 'em."

"You are surely not afraid of snakes, so brave a man as you?"

"I ain't brave. I'm a born coward, I tell yer. But about snakes I'm more of a coward than ever—an' onnateral, sneak-in', foolish coward. I've tried to git over it, but I kain't. The sight of one of them slimy varmints makes me welter all over in a cold perspiration. It does, by gracious. But say, seems to me you was in mighty bad company over yonder when I slipped off the lariats on yer wrists."

"I was," replied the young man. "Perhaps you heard what I said to them, and understand my position. I came out upon these plains in search of something I shall never find, my peace of mind. I had been robbed of all that made life pleasant, and sick of life, I thought to make a home in the far-distant West. In St. Louis I met the man they call Giles Markham, now my deadliest enemy. I believe, for some reason I can not fathom, that the villain was an enemy then, and insnared me because he knew that I was not the man to take kindly to their nefarious business. You do not know who they are."

"Perhaps I do," said the trapper, with the same calm smile. "I know that a greater set of villains never went unhung, an' that I wouldn't turn over my hand to save any man in the gang, 'ceptin' one."

"And that one?"

"Ned, the Growler."

"Yes; that man, strange as it may seem, is an honest man and a true friend. I would give much to see the faithful fellow out of the snares in which he is bound by his oath. I believe he is suited for an honest man, but he is completely insnared in the secrets of that terrible band, and I fear can not be rescued. I must ask one thing: as you are a man of honor, and believe in keeping your honor pure, do not ask me any questions about this nefarious band or my knowledge

of it. Suffice it to say that they are robbers, and no man is safe from them who has any wealth, no matter how trivial. The wandering trapper, the Indian, the fur-trader and the migrant alike, are their prey. We can do much to balk their designs together."

"Good enuff. We'll do it, too. Shake hands on it while we think of it. Now that you have told me that much, I'll tell you something. Come along with me. You'd better take to the saddle, for you ain't over strong arter bein' tied up so long. Come along, Bruiser. Home, old boy."

The hound trotted to the front and the hunter followed, holding Abdallah by the bridle. Their course now tended downward between the two mountain ledges which towered on either side, until the grass began to show itself green and soft under their feet. They reached the point where the pass debouched into a little valley, in the center of which a beautiful spring leaped up, boiling like a caldron and throwing up the white sand from the bottom in little columns. From this spring a rivulet flowed across the valley and entered the mountain above the entrance to the pass.

"That's the stream where the body of that cussid half-breed lies," muttered Gid Granger. "A blacker heart never beat in a human breast than that which the water will wash pure. I had drawed a bead on him, an ef he had reached the side whar you stood he was a dead man. I'm glad he met his death another way. I don't want no sech pizon blood on my hands as that thar."

By the side of the fountain the trapper had built a little cabin, thatched with boughs closely woven into each other. The sides were of the same material, but less closely interwoven, to admit the light and air. A rude structure it was, but the trapper made it supply all his needs. What did he care for comfort, who could make his bed at night wherever the darkness came upon him, and sleep sweetly as a child upon its mother's breast? This was a son of the mountain. He had been born not many miles from the spot he made his home, and had spent his life amid such scenes. Few men were better known in the Far West than Gideon Granger, the mountaineer. He had wandered from the shores of the Golden Horn off San Francisco, to Halifax on the east, and from the uttermost

regions penetrated by the trappers to the north-west of Hudson's Bay to the mouth of the Rio Grande. He knew every tribe by its signs, and was a welcome guest in their lodges. He was careless of the morrow, living from hand to mouth, caring only to trap sufficient peltries in winter to supply his absolute necessities. In this respect, he was like the rest of the "Free Trappers," who scorned to be dependent upon any organized company for their support. He could say with Abdallah : "The sun and wind are my fortification ; I am free, free !"

His first care was to bring a lariat from the hut, with which he picketed Abdallah upon the grassy slope not far from the bank of the stream, after he had allowed him to drink sparingly of the refreshing element. Another horse, a shaggy, fierce-looking beast, was cropping the verdure near at hand, who made a vicious kick at Abdallah as he passed.

"Oh, restrain yourself, Conglomerate," said Gid. "Don't gesticulate so freely with your heels. 'Tain't right, 'tain't proper ; don't even show ordinary politeness on your part. You orter welcome your feller-critters in a different way, you orter."

Having picketed Abdallah, Gid came slowly back, in deep thought, to the place where Brian, after drinking from the bright spring, stood looking with admiring eyes over the beautiful valley, a jewel set into the mountain's breast. Here, apart from the world, the trapper made his home beside this living spring. A hand fell upon his shoulder and he looked up. The trapper stood beside him.

"Stranger," said he, "I promised to show you something, and tell you who I am. Come with me."

He passed round the little spring toward the upper end of the valley, to a place where a grove of beautiful trees stood. The grass was smooth as a bowling-ground, and had evidently been carefully tended. In the center was a long, low mound at which the trapper stooped and pressed his lips upon the turf and remained a moment in silence. Then he rose and said, pointing to the mound :

"Take off your cap. You stand in the presence of the dead."

The mound was a grave !

CHAPTER V.

A DEAD MAN'S HISTORY.

Who slept there? Let the mountaineer tell his own tale, so simple and yet so full of touching pathos. A western idyl—the story of a life in that wild mountain home and of the love one man sometimes bears another. For a moment they stood uncovered beside that grassy mound, while a tear, a strange visitor to that firm-hearted man, stood in the eyes of Gideon Granger. His whimsical manner was all gone, and he was a silent mourner, beside his dead friend's grave.

"Come," he said. "I can not tell his story looking on his grave. It would unman me, and though I am made of stern stuff, I can not speak calmly of him, even here, and he has been long dead. Let us sit upon this log while I tell who he was and how he died.

"I am a plain, blunt man, living in my plain way a life which, if it does little good, is not harmful to the outside world. A mountain man like Gid Granger makes few friends, you know, that is, friends to stick by you through thick and thin, and if need be die for you or by you. This was such a man to me. Not like me, you understand, because he was book-parnt, and could tell me of the stars, and how the planets move in yon blue sky.

"I found him on a summer night upon the prairie, far away from this, unarmed and starving. I did what any mountain man would do, gave him food and drink, and then took him to my home. I found that he was homeless, and that of a party of four who came upon a mission which I am working out for him, and of which I am never to speak to mortal man, he alone remained. Enough said; it was a holy work he had given himself to do, and his life was in it."

"Never mind how he looked. There was a beauty in his life as well as in his face. No coward or idle man was he. In the cold winter he worked by my side along the frozen lakes and rivers, gittin' his food and ammunition by his toil.

Yet, he was not brought up to sich, and when he came to me, his skin was soft and fair, like a boy's. I was sick once, and no woman could have 'tended me with a softer hand than he did. Night an' day he took no rest until Gil Granger was on his feet ag'in, able to do his work. It was a proud thing for sech a man ez me, to know that I had such a man to be my friend. And friend he was, tender, tried an' trew. You donno what he taught me, an' how hard he worked in the long nights to teach me a liddle book-larnin'. I kin write a liddle, an' read easy print, an' thar ain't a man in the Nor'-west dar' sneer at me for bein' proud of it, though it don't put me a grain above the boys. I'm proud of it acause *he* l'arnt me to do it."

"A good man. There wasn't another sich in the mountains. We used to sit under the trees on a starry night and he'd tell me the names of the stars and how they moved. He knew all about them too, and I believed him, because he never told me a lie. He was a brave man, too, and fought by my side in many a mountain battle. Thar; ef I get to talking about him I'll tire you all to death. I'm going to tell you how he died.

"I had been down to Selkirk, and while there we met Giles Markham. Yes, I knew the villain afore to-day and he knows me well, and you bet yer life he don't love me none too well. I know'd he was a scoundrel then, an' all the Nor'-west men know'd it too. 'Twasn't in the village we met him first, but in a gambling-house outside the town. My frier-I didn't go there to gamble. It was part of his work. When we came in, Markham was sitting at a table playing *monté*. He was a good player too, and what's more, he knew how to cheat. We was watching him, an' he looked up an' see James Bailey's face. Bailey wa'n't his name, for that's a secret too. You never saw such a look as passed atween them. Both thar faces was pale as death, and thar eyes wild. James made a leap an' grabbed Markham by the throat, an' they went down together on the floor, rolling over an' over in a fierce grapple. I'll never forgit that night. They rushed in an' parted 'em before either struck a stroke, and held them apart.

"'Let me go!' screamed James. 'Don't you see the

scoundrel? If he stands there with his cruel, treacherous face, I shall go mad. I will have the secret from him, if I tear it out of his black heart.' *

"Markham was as wild as he was, gnashing his teeth at him and swearing to have his blood. Curse him, he kept his word too well.

"When we came to look for him next day, for they would not let the two fight, he was gone. So we went back to the mountains. One day James had been out alone, an' he came in with white lips, and I knew that something was up in a minnet. He never looked so fierce and his eyes so savage, unless he had been sorely tried. 'I am on a scent, Gid,' he said. 'I'll find the villain to-night. Don't you try to stop me or you'll break friendship. You don't know how I hate him.'

"I wouldn't let him go, and made him lie down to get a little sleep. It was twelve o'clock on a clear moonlight night when I woke and he was gone! I jumped up an' run out to see whar he had gone, an' just as I got to the door I heard two pistol-shots at the other side of the valley, over there by the three pines. I ran that way, and just ez I got thar I saw two men jump for their horses an' ride away. I got a shot at one chap, an' you bet yer he went *down*. I don't often miss. The other one got away. James was there, but I saw him stagger, and ran to catch him before he fell.

"Shot in two places, the shoulder and the breast. That was the wound that sped him, just in the middle of his breast, and his clothes were all steeped in gore. I saw that he was sped, and he knew it too, but I carried him in my arms into the cabin an' laid him on the bed in the corner an' tore open his coat. No use; that ball was planted too deep, an' true to sive him. He had fainted when I was bringing him in, but when I tore open his coat he looked up with a smile on his face, actially a smile thar, an' his face was like an angel's.

"'You see, it's all over with me, my brave Gid,' he said. 'You came too late.'

"It wasn't so. I'm a contemptible coward, or I'd never let him be murdered that way. But, Lord; couldn't git him to think so."

"I raised him up and looked in his face, and I saw 'La' the pallor of death was on it, for a cold sweat was coming out on his lips. He knew what that meant, an' kept smiling, for he could not speak easy. Poor fellow; I'd rather lay lain thar than him, coward as I am. He knowed that; Lo knowed that his rough friend was faithful an' true.

Gid,' he said, 'don't look so sad. It's better as it is. What was my life but a daily agony, more than I can bear? I've prayed for death many a time, for the end seemed so far off.' I can't speak the way he spoke, you know. He had a tender, touching way of speaking, that went to my heart. 'I'm goin' to leave you a legacy, Gid,' he said. 'I could not leave it to a better man. You will have a heart in the work, because I believe you love me dearly, and you have been a true friend to me. I leave you my work to do, and you will do it well. But first, you must promise me, as to a man who is dying, that you will not tell to mortal man my name, or what it is you seek until the work is accomplished. You will know who to tell it to then, and tell that one, that my dying blessing fell upon the head of the man who had been so true a friend to me."

The trapper paused; his frame shook with ill-repressed emotion. His eyes were dimmed by tears and he hid his face. When he looked up, there was nothing in it to show what a world of agony he had endured while telling that sad tale.

"Well, he died, like a child a-sleep, and I made him that grave yonder, and I'll keep his mem'ry green while I live. I tend it like a garden every day, and keep the grass fresh and green. It isn't much to do fer as true a heart as that lying under the sod. Thar; I've told the story, an' perhaps you'll laugh at such a man ez me dreamin' over a dead man that way, but, ef you do, good-by. I'll take yer safe to Selkirk an' leave ye thar."

"But, you know I will not laugh, Gid Granger. Look in my face—I'll trouble you to do that much—and tell me whether you see any thing there to lead you to suspect that I would make a jest of any thing that does such credit to our common nature."

"No, I don't," said Gid, shaking hands again, and getting

back his old whimsical manner. "Nothin' of the kind, and I wouldn't hev told the story ef I thort so. Blessed Canaan, boy, we'll lead a happy life, this summer weather. Mebbe we'll hev a spice of fightin', but I don't reckon that will skeer you *much*. What do you know of Giles Markham? Hev ye ever seen his red face?"

"Never. Only the neophytes of the band go without masks, except when sleeping in the secret haunt. I do not even know the face of Ned the Growler, my best friend in that wild band."

"And the gal they call Azalia?"

"I have never seen her face. She is masked like the rest, and I only know that she has a voice as sweet as a bird, and a form of matchless symmetry. That her nature is good, I can not doubt. Why she is a member of that wild band, or why she possesses such power over its leader, I can not say. I know that her word is law to him, and that had she known why I was taken out this morning, Giles Markham would not have dared harm me. It seems strange that this weak girl should possess such strange power, but that she wields it, and for good, I can avouch."

"Gals is peccoliar," said Gid, in a musing tone, his hand supporting his head, and his elbow on his knee. "'Markable, they be. A man is a plaything with the purty creetur's. Even a Digger squaw hez a kind o' control over her lovyer, so to speak. Not to say that it lasts long, 'cause when they ar' married they hev to git round right smart, you bet. Don't it beat all natur', that weak things like them thar, should be abil to turn strong men aside from somethin' they've set thar h'arts on? It's powerful strange, I reckon."

"It is indeed. You are a philosopher, Gid."

"What's that?" said Gid.

"A man that reasons correctly, and judges calmly upon all subjects."

"That's me," said Gid. "Why didn't ye say so, then? Don't talk them dictionary words at me, boss. Them kind of languridge don't work in the mount'ins; so don't let's hev no more on it, ef ye kin git along jest ez well without. Though our ancestors was right smart men too. My father's father writ a dickshinary. 'Twas a pooty good book too, but

the dryest readin' you ever struck. Then, some of the words was the longest you ever wrestled with in all yer born days. I knowed a young man thet got the lockjaw, right smart, tryin' to pernounce one of them words. It was a Dutch name, you understand, an' had mor'n thirty letters in it; the darnedest name. Waal, this young man wrestled with it seven days an' nights, an' finally died in great ag'nies, with that ar' word stuck in his throat, an' two or three syl'bles a-stickin' out of his mouth."

Gid cast a sidelong look at his companion, to see if he swallowed any more of this tremendous yarn than the unfortunate young victim mentioned, and saw him sitting with an inflamed countenance, endeavoring to keep in a gathering roar of laughter.

"Laugh, ef ye want to," said Gid. "Don't throw yerself into an appleplexxy tryin' to keep it down. I've know'd lots of men to die in extremity, all on 'count of a laugh like that ar', keepin' it bottled up too long. I hev, by gracious. My grand'ther, he were an Englishman, my gran f'ither was, know'd a man that kept his face straight in the most disgustin' way, while he was tellin' some of the darnedest, cutest stories you ever hern tell on. Sez the old man to him, that laugh will be the death of yer when it does git out, now you bet yer life. The young man rose an' went away, an' the next night expired a-laughin' over them tremenjis tales."

"For heaven's sake don't, Gid," said the young man, "or you will have me die the same horrible death. Don't sit there telling those fearful stories without moving a muscle of your face. I can't stand it."

"Now that's queer. 'Most every man I ever struck can't stand them stories. They ain't bad stories, nyther, but they seem to git the boys, now that's a fact. They seem to git 'em every time. Now I've struck one or two fellers in my time that didn't believe them stories. Now them is family traditions, an' I ain't goin' to hev 'em doubted by no one that walks the airth. Them stories is true. You don't think I'd tell 'em ef they wasn't, do ye?"

"Of course not," said Brian.

"Juss so. What's the use of a man talkin' ef he ain't to be believed? Now, thar ain't any one thing on the surface

of this wanderin' world, I hate like a liar. A flambergasted mortal, sneakin', crawlin' liar. A feller that never tells the truth, 'cept by mistake. What's the use fur a man to lie? My young friend, let me advise ye. Never allow yerself to tell an untruth; I never do."

There is reason to believe that Gid Granger actually thought so. His wonderful stories never did any harm, for they deceived nobody. Brian understood this man at once. The free trapper's instinct was strong within him. It is a part of their natures to embellish the truth, to put it in mild terms. They delight in idealisms, and the man who can tell the best "yarn," with the calmest face, is famous. Gid Granger had the happy faculty of telling the most outrageous inventions without a change of face, and this faculty rendered him a welcome guest at the camp-fires. Brian Malcom had too deep a knowledge of men and things, to make sport of Gid's infirmity, so he nodded quietly and said nothing.

"I guess we'd better have a little somethin' to try our teeth on," said Gid. "I'm mighty hungry myself. This trampin' over the hills makes a man hungry. Yah-h! kill that blasted thing. I don't want the darned critter nigh me."

As he spoke, Gid leaped upon the log and catching at a limb above his head, hung suspended, uttering yells of rage not unmingled with fear. Brian bounded to his feet and looked around for an enemy, surprised that a man who had shown such spirit and feeling as the trapper should show signs of fear.

"What is it? where is it?" he said, eagerly.

"Thar, thar!" shouted the trapper, still hanging by the limb. "At the root of that tree. Take a chunk an' bu'st it. I won't hev the blasted thing on my camping-ground."

"I don't see any thing," said Brian.

"It's thar, I tell ye. Seen it sneak in under the rock, blame it. Durn a snake, anyhow."

Brian laughed, and going up to the tree, found a small striped snake about two feet long coiled up at the root. A single glance convinced him that it was harmless, and catching it up in his hand, he held it up to the view of the trapper.

"Kill it! kill it!" yelled the trapper. "'Pears like you ain't got no sense."

"This is perfectly harmless," said Brian. "Come and look at him."

"Chunk him!" roared Gid. "You'll make me your enemy ef ye don't look out."

Gid had dropped from his perch upon the log, and Brian held out the snake at arm's length. Gid snatched a revolver from his belt and fired, cutting off the head of the writhing repule.

CHAPTER VI.

A STRANGE VISITOR.

"THAT was a good shot," said Brian. "But, why did you kill the innocent thing?"

"Innocent be blowed. Yer don't know what yer talkin' about. 'Tain't innercent, that thing ain't. Ugh! It makes me shiver all over, like ez ef I had an ager. Snakes, take 'em when an' how you will, ar' a sneakin', pizon, nasty, dirty, ill-mannered brute. That's true as preachin'. Bet yer life. Throw it away, do. See the ugly critter squirm."

Brian laughed, and tossed the snake away. Returning the revolver to his belt, the trapper led the way to the hut. Bringing some kindling material from a pile in one corner, Gid struck a light, and producing a frying pan, began to broil some venison steaks, which he cut from a haunch hanging from a wooden hook behind the door. The savory odor soon filled the room, and Brian, who was sharp set with hunger, after the arduous events of the day, waited eagerly until it was ready. When a steak was done, Gid caught up a pointed stick, thrust it into the meat and handed it to his guest.

"Eat hearty, boy," he said. "Don't be afraid. Plenty more whar that come from."

Brian did not need a second invitation, and plied his masticators with ready zeal, laughing at the fright of Gid over the snake.

"Don't say nothin' 'bout it, stranger," said Gid, gruffly. "I'm pestered enough about that now. Darn me ef it ain't

so bad for a man like me to be afraid of cretters like them, but I be, an' that's gospel. The very idee of a snake sends cold shivers chasing one another down my back, an' clean down into my moccasins. It do, by gracious Moses. But sich is life."

By this time Gid had another steak upon a stick, and was dividing his attention impartially between it and another batch of venison in the frying-pan, taking a bite from the venison at one moment, and turning one of the pieces in the pan the next. While thus employed, neither knew that some one had come to the door of the hut and was looking at them, until a low growl from Bruiser caused them to look up.

A dark-faced boy was standing there, leaning against the door-post, looking at them with a smile. Bruiser evidently did not think him of sufficient account to trouble himself about, for he lay down again, while Gid turned angrily toward the visitor, but smiled when he saw before him a slight youth, evidently not more than eighteen years of age, with a smooth, girlish face upon which the down of early manhood had not begun to show. He was dressed in a fanciful garb, such as the youth of his class love so well—loose Zouave trousers, fastened by a buckle at the ankle; neat boots inclosing small feet, and a blue jacket with silver braid. Under the jacket he wore a waistcoat neatly embroidered. About his waist was a belt, sustaining a pair of silver-mounted pistols and a disk with a richly-chased handle. A fez cap with a black plume was set jauntily upon short, curling dark hair. His face was handsome, browned by exposure to the sun and wind, or else by mixed blood. He stood with a nonchalant, saucy air, leaning against the post, holding, by its muzzle, a small rifle, beautifully mounted.

"What do you want, young 'un?" said Gid, in a forbidding tone. "No boys here."

"Don't get angry," replied the boy, in the same saucy tone. "Don't be afraid, Gid Granger, I won't hurt you."

"Won't hurt? Holy Moses! Look out fer yerself, young 'un! I'm hungry now. Often eat little half-and-halfs like you fer supper."

"Oh, I guess not, Mountain Gid. You won't eat anybody here, and I don't believe you are half so hungry as all that."

"Ain't I? Now, jest you lock a-here, little 'un. How did you come to this camp?"

"Came on my horse, Gid."

"You seem to have my name mighty peart. Maybe you wouldn't mind tellin' me how yer managed that?"

"Easy enough, Gid. Who is there in the Saskatchewan region that don't know Gid Granger, the ranger—Mountain Gid, the hero of a hundred fights and twice as many skirmishes! You're too well known, Gid; your face betrays you."

"I'm gittin' pooty hungry," said Gid, reaching out his long arm, and seizing the boy by the wrist. Outlandish hungry, I be. Now, look yer; I ask you ag'in how you come byar, an' you'd better tell me."

"Don't be hard on the lad, Gid," said the younger man. "He don't look as if he had any harm in him."

"How do *you* know?" said Gid, fiercely. "It mout be a trap jest ready to spring on us. The people we fear hev got jest sech tools ez this yer puling, weak, spider-legged half-an-half. Say, boy, jest give me a good reason why I shouldn't bite a piece right out of yer shoulder. It looks mighty tender; guess I'll take a piece."

"Pshaw!" said the boy, in a petulant tone, swinging himself out of the grasp of Gid with eel-like agility. "Don't be foolish, Gid. I know you are the best-hearted fellow in the world, and would not hurt me if you knew I had come here purposely to betray you."

"Wouldn't, eh?"

"No," said the boy, boldly.

Gid looked hard at the half breed, and the boy returned the gaze steadily. Evidently he had not the slightest fear of Mountain Gid, and a smile broke over the hard features of the old ranger as he gazed.

"I guess the boy knows me," he muttered. "Nice boy, too. Come, sonny; I was a leetle grain harsh with you, but I didn't mean no harm, nohow."

"Oh, I don't blame you," replied the boy. "Why don't you ask me to come in?"

"I guess you don't need any invitation. Seems ez ef you'd come, anyhow," replied Gid.

The boy laughed and showed a set of white teeth as he

did so. Then he set his rifle against the wall, and walked quietly into the cabin, and sat down on a pile of buffalo-ropes in one corner, looking hard at Brian, who returned his gaze. There was a half-smile upon the face of the boy as he saw the disturbed look in the face of Brian, but he said nothing, and sat calmly waiting for their questions.

"Hungry, *you?*" demanded Gid.

"A little," replied the boy; "not very."

"Then stick them white teeth into that ar'!" said Gid, reaching a piece of venison toward him. The youngster drew his dagger, thrust it through the meat, and began to eat heartily, laughing at the novel feast.

"Mebbe you wouldn't mind tellin' us how you come hyar, sonny," said Gid.

"Not in the least. I was riding in the mountains, and saw two Indians coming down the pass. I have no particular love for Indians, and I rather think they don't love me. But, that don't matter. I turned into the pass, the first one on the right of the Dead Man's Gulch, and rode hard, because I did not know but my red friends might have seen me. I had no quarrel with them, and if we had met, I should have been forced to hurt them, perhaps."

"Yaas," said Gid, with a grin, "you fully look it."

"You are laughing at me, Gid Granger," said the boy. "I want you to understand that I know how to shoot."

"*Do you?*"

"I'll make a match with you to shoot with revolvers at twenty paces, and bet you that I beat you, too," said the boy.

Gid Granger half rose from the log upon which he was seated, and looked with open eyes at the saucy face of the young boaster, who returned his gaze unflinchingly, and Gid looked the picture of astonishment.

"Blame my cats ef I don't think the cussed boy me ns jes' what he sez. Shoot! shoot with *me!*—Gid Granger, that kin hit a buffler's eye with a rifle at two hundred yards! An' this hop-o'-my-thumb wants to shoot ag'in' me with a pistol! I'm 'shamed to look at him."

"That's about the way I put it, Gid," replied the boy, in his easy, off-hand manner. "I only want to give you a fair chance to keep your reputation good. I don't like to go

away leaving the impression behind me that I have bragged without good reason for it."

"Come out!" said Gid, seizing him by the collar. "Death and destruction, come out! Fire and fury, git your pistol! I never was so mad since I first drawed breath, by Canaan! Come; no foolishness now! I've a good notion to break you in two."

"I can go without any help, Gid," said the boy. "Didn't I say I'd shoot with you? What more do you want?"

"Yes, and ef you've lied to me, I'll run you out of camp with the end of a lariat. Kin you hit the spiked end of a sunbeam, you young villain? Kin you shoot a hammin'-bird on the wing, an' cut his head off without ruffin' a feather on his body, you desperate wretch?"

"I dare say I could, if I tried," said the boy. "Is that what you are going to shoot at, Gid?"

"Hush up! You make me so mad I've a notion to drop you right now—I hev, by gravy! I'd like to swallow just such a boy as you, 'bout this time of day. I'd make a choice morsel of you, you're so fat, an' plump, an' juicy, you spider-legs of a boy. The idee of *your* comin' here to shoot ag'in' me! What mark will you shoot at, you perjured wretch?"

"Don't make a duel of it, Gid. I was only in sport at first, though I do think I can beat you. Come; you don't think I can shoot, so put Bruiser over there at forty paces, and if I don't hit him in the right eye, I'll agree to let you shoot at me the same distance. If I don't hit the dog, I know you can't hit me."

"That young reprobate is tired of life, an' wants me to kill him, that's what he wants. An' he'll git it, too, ef I kin give it to him. He wants to kill my dorg Bruiser, the only creature that's stuck by me through thick an' thin all these years. Yes, he does; the inhuman brat would kill that dorg!"

"You are wrong," said the boy. "I would not injure that noble beast for any wealth the world can offer. Come, Gid, don't be angry with me. I like my joke, and I wanted some fun with you. I came here to see you and to warn you. Nothing else would bring me to this place."

"To warn me?"

"Yes; to warn you both, for I know you both, although

you do not know me. Captain Giles Markham is like a lion aroused in his lair. He swears that he will not rest until he has killed you both, one as a traitor to his wild band, and the other as an accomplice."

"And who are you?"

"Ask that of some one else. I only come with a warning, because I do not think you are bad men. The evil chance which made you, Brian Malcom, the companion of Giles Markham, is as much to be regretted as the chance which made the captain the sworn enemy of Gid Granger. I do not know why he hated Gid before, but he did."

"I must know you," cried Brian, eagerly. "I must satisfy a doubt as yet but half formed, as to who and what you are. Your eyes haunt me. I can not help the feeling that, in some other place than this, I have seen them often."

"Look at me closely, then," said the boy, with a slight sneer. "Decide for yourself whether you have ever seen me before."

"I never have, to my knowledge. And yet, the thought will come into my mind that I know you and have seen you."

"Fancies of the brain. What is there in me to lead you to suspect that we have ever met before? My name is Norman Gleason, and what I am is nothing to you. One thing I would have you believe: and that is, that I would serve you honestly and faithfully. Leave this place, and never again set foot in the foothills of the Saskatchewan."

The language of the young man was pure, and his tones smooth and flowing. Looking in his face, neither of the others could believe that he came to them with any evil purpose.

"My boy," said Brian, "I thank you, for I think you came in good faith. It is something to a wandering man to know that there is one in all the earth whose heart beats kindly for him. I believe that, in some way to me inexplicable, you are connected with the band of Giles Markham. Perhaps you are the child of some one of its members unknown to me."

"I have not said so," replied Norman.

"Nor shall I ask it of you, my lad. Let me only thank you for putting yourself in peril, for you must do so to be

the wishes of that fierce gang, and beg that you will do no more, for your own sake."

"You are ungrateful."

"I am not, I hope. Your kindness in coming here will never be forgotten while I have life. In earnest of this, take this ring. My mother gave it to me, long ago, and I have kept it as a sacred memento of her. Wear it as a remembrance of a man to whom you did a service in making him know that this wild band held at least two noble hearts—your own and that of a rough but honest man, Ned, the Growler."

"Ah; you know Ned. Poor fellow, he is sadly out of place there, in the midst of scenes which suit my fitful humor. Ned was born an honest man, and would be so now but for me. I thank you, and will keep your ring. Now, promise me that you will go away."

"I can make no promise. Gid Granger saved my life, and for his sake I will remain until he bids me go."

"But Mountain Gid has undertaken a Quixotic task, one he will never accomplish. He would remove mountains by his labor—honest Gid would—if he were strong enough. He is doing work for another, I understand, and the task is a holy one; but, useless—"

"Stop!" cried Gid. "Don't tell me that, unless you want me to give you the lie in yer teeth. Nothin' is impossible or useless to a man who has a fixed purpose. Nothing ever can be. I've my work to do, and I swear by yonder green grave I will try to do it while the Good Master gives me life and health."

"I honor you in your work, Gid Granger. Longer than you know, I have watched you in your set purpose. I have prayed, for even I can pray, that it might prosper. Will you let me take your hand before I go and feel its honest pressure? It is something to shake the hand of an honest man, and to feel that his heart is good and pure."

"Wait, boy," said Gid. "Don't go yit. I like ye and want yer to stay here. Don't go back to that infernal gang in the mountains. You like honest men, you say. Then stay here, boy; it's your best chance."

"You ask more than I can grant. You see me here—wild, reckless of all things, riding over the mountains night

bad day when and where I like, always desirous of shaking off the yoke of this band but not daring to do it. But, I thank you for the offer. You know nothing of the tie which binds me to Giles Markham."

"I have half a mind to keep you, even against your will," said Brian.

The boy bounded back suddenly and raised a silver whistle to his lips. At the call a small black horse which had been making acquaintance with Abdallah and the rough mustang of the trapper, came springing back. The boy was in the saddle before they could stretch out a hand to stop him.

"Farewell!" he cried. "I will see you again and bring you a warning from another hand."

CHAPTER VII.

DAYTON'S PUNISHMENT.

GID stood with a half comic look upon his face, gazing at his companion, who was equally puzzled. The sudden sitting of the youngster had taken them both by surprise, as much as his coming had done.

"I know him now," cried Gid. "It is 'Flit,' the messenger of Giles Markham. I have heard strange tales of him. He bears a charmed life, and rides where he will and when he will. Even Giles Markham has no control over the wild lad. If he chooses to go, not all the power of the outlaw kin keep him, I allow. But, the boys at the camp-fires say that 'Flit' is kind to them, and I know he brought a warning to two friends of mine that saved 'em from the outlaws. It's hard to make him out, rayther."

"His face is honest," said Brian.

"Seems so, boy. But, I've hern tell of men puttin' on the lev'ry of heaven to serve the devil in. That sounds queer, I know, but they do it, durn 'em! Howsomever let's talk business. It's time we was to work."

"At night? It is almost dark."

"Bah! I've tramped through too many moonlight nights to mind it. That boy puzzles me. Who sent him here? He talked as ef he was *sent*."

"It might be Azalia."

"And who the devil is Azalia?"

"An angel."

"Juss so. Lots of them angels layin' round loose, nowadays. I guess her wings ain't cropped out yet. Angels! Bah! My gran'ther caught an angel onc't, an' 'twan't no poor shuck of an angel neither, but the old man 'lowed 'twan't no use to him, an' let it fly. *He* didn't know what to do with it, the old man didn't."

"That lets *you* out, Gid," said Brian, laughing. "Catchin' an *angel*; that's a good one."

"'Tain't no wuss than yours. Who talked 'bout angels first, say? Was it me?"

"I mean an earthly angel," said Brian, "not a heavenly one."

"How d'ye know but I mean an' airthly angel too?" growled Gid. "I'll bet you forty dollars my gran'father's angel kin out-rag your angel any day in the week! Stands to reason a young 'un like you is goin' to strike a better angel than a tough old sojer like him, now don't it? Oh, come along, do. I can't stand foolin' all day. I've had enuff talk, anyhow."

The horses were brought up and saddled and the two rode out of the valley, followed by Bruiser. The dog looked ominous as they proceeded. His bristles seemed to rise like wires, and his eyes blazed. They were evidently approaching something for which the dog had an' antipathy, though what it was neither of the men could make out. By this time they had entered the upper pass, the one by which the trapper had intended Brian to make his escape, and were moving along between gigantic walls, when suddenly Bruiser uttered a roar like a lion and bounded into a low growth of sage bushes beside the path.

"Here, Bruiser! What the devil ails the dorg?" shouted Gid. "'The rascal is worrying something."

Gid sprung from his saddle and darted into the bushes, where he heard a cry of abject fear, and saw that Bruiser

had a man down upon the earth pinned by the back of the neck. Luckily for the man, the teeth of the dog met in the cape of his hunting-shirt, which he had thrown over his head for protection.

"Take him off!" roared a voice. "Oh, good Lord, gentlemen, don't let the savage beast chew me up. Thunder and lightning, why don't you help a feller so?" Oh, good Lord deliver me from evil. The devil take the dog and his master and friends, and may they go to a hotter hole than Oregon. Oh, oh, oh!"

Gid laughed heartily, and, seizing Bruiser by the neck, he hauled him away from the prostrate man, but Bruiser was stubborn and wrestled vigorously with his master, eager to get at his enemy.

"What in thunder ails you?" roared Gid, cuffing the dog on each side of the head. "You want me to break you in two, that's what you want. Git behind me, Sain!"

The dog retreated, growling, and evidently not well pleased to be kept from immolating this new enemy, who rose to his feet in a manner which showed that he did not care for a closer acquaintance with the dog. He was a short, dark-faced, sullen-looking fellow, clad in a hunting shirt of buck-skin. At the first glance, Gid, who was a keen judge of human nature, decided that he did not like his face.

"Feller-critters," said the man, in a cringing, obsequious tone, "how are ye? Keep off that cussid dog, will ye?"

"The dog won't hurt yer, mister," said Gid. "What waa ye doin' in the bushes?"

"Wal, I was layin' down thar; got kind o' tired with trampin' through the woods, and struck a soft place for a snooze, an' thought I'd try it awhile," replied the man. "Gale Frisbee's my name. I'm a free trapper of the Nor'-west, an' a rip-roarin' catamount, I be, you bet!"

"Yes, you roared loud enuff when the dorg grabbed you," the old ranger replied, looking hard at the speaker. "Seems to me a sage bush is a queer place to go to sleep in. Most git a rattlesnake in yer boots afore mornin', an' how would yer like that?"

"Ain't afeard of rattlesnakes, mister," said Gale Frisbee. "Rattlesnakes an' me is the best of friends. Now look here."

Thrusting his hand into his pocket, he drew out a small snake of the species mentioned, alive and squirming, and it coiled itself about his arm. The old man uttered a cry of rage, and making a sudden leap, he struck the fellow a blow between the eyes which might have felled an ox. His heels flew high into the air, and he struck upon the back of his head, on the hard flooring of the pass. The snake slipped out of his grasp, and Gid stamped the life out of it in a moment.

"I'll bruise ye, ye pizon sarpint! Watch that snake-man, Brian. I'm goin' to lick him out of his boots; you see if I don't."

"He don't need any more punching," said Brian. "What did you strike him for?"

"I kin lick any man that kerries snakes round in his pocket," replied Gid. "The pizon thief! a rattlesnake, too!"

"Doubtless he had extracted the fangs," replied Brian.

"S'pose he had?" roared Gid. "Would any Christian man be seen with snakes in his pockets? I've heard tell of men hevin' snakes in ther boots, but they didn't want 'em thar, nohow. Couldn't help themselves, that's all. This devil carried 'em with malice prepense an' aforethought, he did! I'm so fi'tin' mad I dunno what to do. Oh, git up, Snakey Frisbee; do git up, till I bu'st you ag'in, right in the snoot."

"Look yer, stranger, I'd rather be kicked by a mustang than have ye hit me ag'in. I'll take me chaintees on that. Or, if you kin stir up a small airthquake, I'll take some airthquake for mine."

"What do you kerrey snakes fur, then?" howled Gid. "Did some one tell you I were down on them pizon critters?"

"No, they didn't, boss. Ef they had, I wouldn't hev been such a consarned fool as to lag the critter out of my pocket. It's durned mean to hit a man that hard."

"'Tain't no meaner than to kerrey snakes," said Gid. "Now, then: you ain't explained how you cum here."

"Country's free to me as well as you, ain't it?" growled the stranger.

"Mebbe 'tis. I want ye to understand that this yer is Tom Tiddler's ground, an' I'm Tom Tiddler. So, you git off!"

"I didn't think you'd drive a feller-cretter away in *that* style," whined the man. "You've broke my nose, and now you want to drive me out of the kentry."

"Here; you like snakes. Look out the fust hole in the ground an' go down it. I'll bet you find a snake 'fore you git to the bottom that will make you wish your name wa'n't *what it is*," said the moutaineer.

"Frisbee is my name—Gale Frisbee."

"So you said. Frisbee ain't a bad name onc't you git used to it. I don't mind that so much, but thar ain't room in this part of the kentry for *snake* men."

"I'd like to go with you," said the man, piteously. "I dunno the kentry, and that's why I got into the bushes. I hern you comin', and I didn't know but it might be Injins."

"Or *outlaws*," said Brian.

"Eh?"

"Outlaws, I said. Brothers of the League, you know. Fine fellows they are, too!"

"I dunno what you mean more than a dead man, mister," said Frisbee. "If thar's outlaws here I've got to go with you. I kain't stay behind and be gobbled up by them."

"You ain't got any horse," said Gid. "We have a long ride to make."

"Don't make no sort of difference. I kin travel as fast as you kin in these hills."

"What is that in your hand?" said Brian, suddenly.

The man had his fist doubled up and something in it. He turned deadly pale when the young man asked the question, and would have leaped back, but the knife of young Malcom was at his throat.

"Hold on," said Brian. "Gid, wring open that fist and see what he has there."

In spite of the struggles of the rascal they wrenched open his hand and showed that he held a crumpled mask, such as was worn by Markham's outlaws!

"I thought so," said Brian. "Gid, do you know who this fellow is? His snake charming powers have betrayed him. It is my friend, Tom Dayton, whose vote doomed me to death in Dead Man's Gulch."

A perfect howl of terror broke from the guilty wretch, and

he fell upon his knees, holding up his hands for mercy. The young man answered by a look which would have caused the wretch to sink into the earth if he had the power.

"God's mills grind slowly, but they grind very fine," said Brian. "This morning you had it in your power to save my life, but would not. To-night you are here and we can do with you as we like."

"Spare me, spare me, gentlemen," said Dayton, dropping his Western slang. "I am not so guilty as you think; nothing near so guilty as you think."

"Why did you waylay us to-night?"

"Who said I did? You might have gone on your own business for all me. I was not on your track. I heard you coming and ran into the bushes until you passed, that is all."

"But you are on the road to my camp, ain't you?" said Gid.

"Ain't it the right way to hit the prairie?" said Dayton. "I've crossed your clearing a dozen times before now."

"Enough said," said Gid. "I'm for tying this chap, an' givin' him five dozen with the end of a lariat. What do you say?"

"You'd better not," hissed the traitor. "I warn you."

"Don't threaten me, mister," said Gid. "Gimme that lariat, Brian. I guess we might ez well tie him up. Likely we kin talk to him jest as well that way."

Dayton raved, swore, and tried to get a silver whistle to his lips, but they were too strong for him, and he was borne down in spite of his struggles, gagged and bound.

"This man deserves punishment at our hands," said Brian, "and he shall have it. I saved his life at the risk of my own, and yet, he turned upon me, at the first opportunity, and destroyed my hopes of life. A wretch like this certainly deserves but little mercy at our hands."

Gid said nothing, but was engaged in cutting a lariat into convenient lengths and knotting it. The traitor shivered and looked anxiously at them, but they made no sign to signify that they noticed him. When ready, they raised his hands above his head, and fastened them tightly to a branch of the pine tree near by and drew them taut. His jacket was already removed, leaving his back bare. He turned upon them with a look of hatred, at which Gid only laughed lightly.

"You can't skeer any one with a look," said he, gently. "We ain't that kind of fellers. Now, look here; if Brian Malcom was willin' to let you go—which he isn't—I wouldn't do it. Yer a traitor to every thing good an' true, and ye may thank yer stars we don't hang ye up for the crows to pick at."

Dayton could not speak on account of the gag, but his eyes looked like burning coals. Gid took the hastily-improvised "cat" in his hands, stepped back, measured the distance with his eye and struck.

Dayton could honestly avow it was no infant's hand which struck the blow, and a hollow groan answered it. We will not follow out the details of the punishment, but when they loosened his hands, Tom Dayton had a good reason for hating them both. They removed the gag from his mouth and threw his hunting-shirt on loosely.

"I suppose you are satisfied?" he said.

"Waal, I feel better myself," said Gid. "How ar' you?"

"You shall repent this some day, my friend," said Dayton. "I give you fair warning of that. Keep it in mind."

"Do you threaten?"

"Not exactly. I am hardly in a position to do that with safety. You have disgraced me, and I am a gentleman born and bred. We shall see."

Gid took away his weapons and threw them down the rocks, and then cut the cords which bound his hands, while the man looked at him savagely.

"I never hated either of you before," he said. "It may be a pleasure for you to know that you have made an enemy who will not forget. Brian Malcom, you betrayed me. Look to yourself. Tremble when the blow comes."

"All right," said Gid. "We'll wait for that. Git to horse, Brian. This chap won't trouble us to-night. Come along, Brasher. Don't pin the poor devil ag'in."

Brasher followed them slowly, evidently desirous of taking another grip at the scoundrel. They left him standing on the rocks, and rode down the pass.

"Ride hard while it is light enough," said the ranger. "Need all the light we kin git to reach good ground. That

chap back thar won't feel easy whar he plants hisself for breakfast for many a day. I took keer of that."

"I pitied the wretch at the same time that I believed we were meting out pure justice," said the young man.

"Don't waste pity on *him*, young 'un," replied Gid. "He don't deserve it, nohow, nor any of that fannelly gang. I hain't got a vindictive ha'r in this old head of mine, not a durned ha'r, but I'd like to see the skulps of that party hang up in a row. 'Twould make a han'some pieter. That cuss sot me ag'inst him when he took out that blasted snake. A man that kerries snakes in his pocket ain't fit to live; scurcey fit to make dog's meat of, the condemned critter!"

They were riding at a good pace now, for the darkness was gathering fast, and they needed to go fast to get into the broad path where the pass was more secure. As they turned the angle of rock leading into this larger pass, Gid drew rein, and looked. All was dark as Erebus, and would be until the moon rose at eight o'clock. As Gid leaned forward to peer into the gloom, he saw something which made his blood leap quickly through his veins. What was it?

Just in front of them an uncertain light was beginning to glow, and the click of a pistol-lock was heard.

"Spring the light," said a stern voice, not twenty feet away.

A huge lantern was suddenly unveiled, and the two men saw just in front fifteen or twenty men armed to the teeth, bending forward in a listening attitude.

They had fallen into a snare.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE OUTLAWS' CAMP.

GIDEON GRANGER had been taught in a rough school, whose chief article of creed was to act promptly in the hour of danger. He fired a pistol at the man with the lantern, and it went out. The shining weapons were not yet leveled, and there was yet time to act. Flinging himself out of the saddle, he caught Brian by the wrist and dragged him to the

earth, just as a volley—well directed if they had remained in the saddle, but harmless to men upon the ground—rattled over their heads. Gid gave a deep groan, and loosened his hold upon the horses. Both horses instantly dashed wildly down the pass, leaving the two men on foot. Gid took his companion by the hand, and, stooping to keep out of sight, dragged him into a narrow path up the mountain side and hurried to a place of safety, just as the band, satisfied that they had done for the daring mountaineer and his companion, rushed up to the spot they had just left.

"That will teach them to spy," roared a voice, which they knew to be that of Markham. "If there is any life in them, put it out."

"Not if I knows it," muttered Gid. "You won't put out any life here, you p'izon critter."

"The horses are off," said another voice. "Remember, I claim that black mustang, when we catch them. I won him this artemnoon."

"You hear that, Brian," whispered the trapper. "He's won your boss. Haw! haw! haw!"

"Hush!" said Brian. "They are coming nearer."

"You don't s'pose I'm afraid of 'em on my *own* mount'ins, do ye? I doubt ef ther fools enough to chase *me*. Let 'em try it, that's all. Why, blame ther pictur's, I'll light on 'em so heavy, I'll be like enuff to make 'em forgit ther parents."

The outlaws, having relighted the lantern, were searching up and down for the bodies of their victims. They did not deem it possible that they could have missed them. Curses made the air rank as they found that no blood had been shed, except that of the unfortunate who had held the lantern.

"The horses are off with a vengeance," said the captain, "and the men upon their backs. But, one of them is hurt. I heard him groan."

"That was Gid Granger," said the man who had spoken last. "I know his melodious voice."

"I hope he got his gruel," said Markham, vindictively. "Then to horse, men! We know the way they have taken, and that way is ours. We will build a fire about Gid Granger's ears, which will make him rue the day he meddled with the 'Brothers of the League.'"

They mounted, and went clattering down the pass, and Gid Granger rose and looked after them with a strange smile upon his face. "Yes, yes, they are on their way to bring destruction, blood and fire upon my happy valley; but, woe to them if they trample on the grave of my friend! Let 'em dare to set the mark of a moccasin on his ground, and small will be the rest I take till I've met the man that did it. I'm glad they've gone that way, anyhow. Durn ther lides, it gives me a chance I've waited fer."

"Our horses?" said Brian, in a questioning tone.

"Gone; them hosses ar' past prayin' fur. No matter fur that; we've got good legs to kerry us. Ef you think it possible fer them cussid thieves to keep ther hands off a hoss, you don't know 'em half ez well ez I do. Steal! They'd steal the cents off a dead squaw's eyes, them devils would. Blame ther pictur's, I hate 'em like death."

The old ranger set off across the mountain, taking an easterly course. Brian had armed himself, before leaving the valley, with the weapons of the dead friend of Gid, a fine rifle and a pair of pistols. He tried to emulate the noiseless tread of his comrade, but, that was something which only long practice could give. The moon came out at length, and still found them on their way. All at once, Gid Granger paused upon a rocky platform and pointed downward. Following the direction of his finger, Brian saw a camp-fire gleam, and bent forward to look.

"As I live, you have brought me to the open camp of the outlaws. I know the spot well. What do you mean?"

"'When the cat's away the mice will play,'" replied Gid, quietly. "We won't git a better time to s'arch out the mysteries of this camp."

"Dare you go down?" said Brian. "Remember the danger."

"Do I care for that?" said Gid. "Bah! You need no: foller unlest you like."

"I do not think my obligations to you should give you the right to insult me, Gid Granger," replied Brian, sternly.

"That's right, young 'un," rejoined Gid, laughing. "I knowed you'd flare up at that, by gracious! I'd hev qu'it ye ef ye hadn't. Waal, then, we'll go down."

"There is but one entrance to the valley, and none but the experienced can tread it, so strongly is it beset by traps and snares. How will you enter?"

"I ain't scouted round here so long for nothing," replied Gid. "I'll show ye a way your fellers never thought of."

Brian followed him without a word along the face of the rock, to a place where one of those strange crevices ran down through the heart of the mountain. The moonlight was bright enough to show them the way, and they began to descend, much in the same way in which Gid had come to the aid of Brian. The dog, to the surprise of Maleom, followed them cautiously down, showing a catlike agility wonderful in so large an animal. The crevice stopped when they were within twenty feet of the valley bottom, and they crept out to reconnoiter. The valley itself might have contained five acres—one of those singular gems set into the heart of the mountains, which these outlaws had chosen for their den. The camp-fire which they had seen was nearly in the center of this opening, and two or three rude huts showed themselves in the background. A single form could be seen seated beside the fire, between them and the blaze.

"Jest ez I thort," said Gid. "All gone but one. Now let's git down ez quick ez we kin."

A tree grew up close to the perpendicular wall of the valley. Descending this, slowly, they reached the bottom, where they dropped to the earth and waited to see if their movements had been discovered. But the figure beside the fire did not move, nor indicate in any way that he noticed the coming of the intruders. The dog, obedient to the order of his master, ran along the rocks above them, looking for a place from which he could descend, and in a moment stood beside them.

"I knowed he'd do it," muttered Gid. "Thar ain't sech a dog in Oregon or Minnesota, now I tell ye. Down, Bruiser!"

The dog fell to the earth and lay with his head between his paws, looking keenly at the figure by the fire. Gid made a sign to his friend to remain where he was, while he himself should steal upon the unsuspecting foe. Lying on his face, and watching the advance of the ranger, the young man could but admire the skill with which he approached the fire.

Every foot or two he paused, with one knee upon the ground, supporting himself with one hand while he looked at the object he approached. Then, when hardly ten feet separated them, he made a sudden bound and seized the person at the fire by the throat.

"Speak and you die!" he hissed, as Brian approached rapidly. "I— The devil!"

He loosened his grip and stared open-mouthed. He held a woman in his grasp, and the natural goodness and gallantry of his heart would not let him injure one of her sex. But he kept up a stern face.

"How many in this camp?" he demanded. "Speak, but not too loud."

"No one. I am quite alone. I hope you will do me no injury, gentlemen."

"Azalia!" cried Brian.

She turned upon him suddenly, and they saw a light, girlish figure, clad in a garb much like that worn by the Indian women of the better class—a kirtle of green cloth over a pair of Turkish trousers, moccasins ridiculously small, and a black Kossuth hat with a waving plume. Over the kirtle she wore a velvet sacque, curiously embroidered. Her face was hidden by a Venetian mask!

"You, Brian Maleom?" she cried in a voice of horror. "Do you *dare* to lead any one here, after taking the vow?"

"I must right myself, in your eyes, Azalia," replied Brian. "I can not bear that you, of all others, should think me either weak or dishonorable. I did not lead a step in this direction, nor did I know where Gid was taking me until I looked down into the camp."

"And did you instruct this fellow to make this rule a salt upon me?" she cried. "Take your hands off, sir."

"Spittire is mad, she is!" said Gid, in a pathetic tone. "Now, don't rile up at me, miss. I didn't know but it was a man, 'cause that blasted hat fooled me. It did, *honest Injin*."

"We mean na harm to you, Azalia," said Brian, eagerly.

"Why are you here?"

"I can not tell. I promised to follow Gid Granger wherever he went, and I will do it. You do not understand. He

saved my life when it was to be sacrificed by Giles Markham."

"How was that? I heard that you had left the band, but did not know the reason."

"If you will give me your attention, I will tell you," said the young man. "I beg you to grant me this opportunity. No man can tell, in our perilous position, how long or short life may be, and I could not die happy, knowing that you believed me mean or base. Will you give me a moment of your time?"

"You are in danger here, and yet you talk of wasting time in idle conversation. How can you tell at what moment the troop may return? And if they did, and found you here, all my influence would not save your lives for a moment. Giles Markham hates you too deeply now to need this last reason for wishing your life."

"I only ask a moment. There is no danger of the return of the band. By this time they have reached Granger's valley, but they have a work of destruction to do before they can return. Grant my request."

He took her hand and led her aside, while the trapper stood leaning on his rifle, regarding the youthful pair with strange interest. Perhaps he had a vision of the day when he was young, and his blood would warm at the touch of a woman's hand, and his eye grow bright at the sound of a woman's voice.

"Yes, yes," he muttered. "Young blood; young blood I'm a-gittin' old, I'm afeard. Yit it don't seem more'n yister-day when I used to meet Gale Fletcher's darter by the river out thar. Thirty years gone by sence they laid her in the grave. She done me good in her short life, though I couldn't hev her to help me all through the journey. I'd be a better man ef she'd 'a' lived! Lay still, Briser; let the young couple talk. They kain't do no hurt with their tongues, poor critters, ef they don't wag 'em too long. What a thing it is to be young, an' love a woman! Ah!"

The mountaineer sighed, and leaned heavily on his piece, with his eyes fixed upon that portion of the valley from which they must expect danger if any came. Azalia felt the eyes of Brian Malcom on her face, and her glance fell.

"It is a strange thing," said Brian, "that a man should love a woman as tenderly as I love you, and never see her face. No matter; I have seen your eyes, and heard your voice, and that is enough for me. I will believe in your goodness and purity, and love you, to the last of my days."

"Oh, sir," she said, in a breaking voice. "Is it right to try me thus? You know what a life I lead among these mountain outlaws, but you do not know that fate has willed it so that I *can not* leave them. A tie binds me to them which it is not in the power of a true woman to break. I *must* bear the grief and the pain; I must bear it alone!"

"Let me tell you how I love you—how I adore you."

"Away," she cried, wildly. "Love! It is not for me to think of. Others may have their day-dreams realized, but not unhappy Azalia Markham. I know that Giles Markham does wicked and cruel things when I am not by, but, he is my father."

"Your father? It can not be!"

"It is—it is! No father ever was more tender to his daughter than mine. My slightest wish is a law to him. I have but to hint it, and if it is in his power to grant, it is realized. How can I leave him, even if he is wicked to others?"

"But, does this life content you, Azalia?"

"No; how can it content me? I have my dreams as well as others, my aspirations for a quiet home, far from this evil place. But, it can never be realized. Since the day when my father took me from school in St. Louis and brought me here, I have led this strange life, doing some good, I hope, and being the cause of saving human life."

"How long have you been here, then?" he said.

"Two years. It would have been better for me if he had never fitted me by education for a higher life, for then, perhaps, I would not have yearned for it so much. No matter; I must work out my fate."

"Young 'un," said Gid, approaching at this moment, "sorry to interrupt you, ez the hangman said to the man that was makin' his farewell speech, but, biz is biz. This kin't go on any longer. Giles Markham will be comin' back. Besides, I've got somethin' to say to this gal."

"Who is this man?" said Azalia.

"Gid Granger is my name, oftentimes called Mountain Gid, the Big Catamount of the S'katchewan. I'm a mortal enemy to all pizon critters like that cussid Giles Markham, an' my business here is to go through his ranche. Is this whar he lives?"

"It is one of a hundred haunts," replied Azalia. "So, you are Gid Granger? I have heard of you as a noble and generous man, and do not fear you."

"Git out!" said Gid, bashfully. "I'm the mortalest kind of a hungry critter when I git my mad up. Why, Lord love your little heart, ef I's hungry, I wouldn't make two bites out of ye. Say, didn't you send a pizon little critter to my ranche this arternoon?"

"I?"

"Yes; that's what I said; a sassy little thief of a half-and-half, that brags of his pistol-shooting."

"It is useless to try to deceive you," said Azalia. "I did have something to do with that visit, for I knew you would be called upon this night by my father's band, and I wished to save your life, and that of Brian Malcom."

"Whar is the little critter?"

"He had a long ride. Did you expect to find him here?"

"Ain't got back, eh? Waal, I'd like to see the little cuss ag'in, for, though he was so all-fired sassy, I rather liked him. Wish I could see him."

"You will see him again. He will be my messenger at all times when I need to communicate with you. The boy is devoted to me, and does my errands well."

"Sassy? That ain't no word fur it. But I like sassy boys when ther smart. But, I kain't stand one that's duff an' sassy too, blame 'em! Now I'm going through th. ranche."

"What ails the dog?" said Azalia. "Look at him."

"He scents pizon critters," said Gid, bringing his rifle to a level. "Ha! what is that? Leg it, Brian; leg it as ef the devil kicked you on cend. Here they come!"

The two men darted away, just as a rush of horses' feet was heard. "After them!" cried the voice of Giles Markham. "Take them, dead or alive!"

CHAPTER IX.

GID'S MASKED BATTERY.

BRIAN MALCOM needed no incentive to speed. The wild cheers of the outlaws rung in his ears as he ran, and he heard the heavy tramp of a horse close at his heels. He looked over his shoulder and saw a fearful vision in the moonlight—Giles Markham, his face livid, his eyes blazing, holding above his head a heavy hatchet ready for a blow. Without pausing in his course the young man drew a pistol, and then half-wheeling, shot the horse through the head. He might have killed the man as easily, but he could not take the life of Azalia's father so soon after his interview with her. He saw the black horse rear frantically, paw the air for a moment, and drop dead in his tracks, rolling over his rider, whose foot was entangled in the stirrup.

"Follow the dog," shouted the trapper, looking back. "Forward, double quick!"

Two long leaps placed him by the side of the speaker. The outlaws were a hundred yards behind. Bruiser led them straight to the point at which he had descended, and sprung upon a shelf six feet from the ground at one mighty leap. They scrambled after him and ran along the platform to the crevice, in which they took their stand. The foremost outlaw went down, shot through the shoulder by the unerring hand of Gid, who did not care to kill him. The next rolled out of the saddle with a broken arm, and the others laked in fear; while two or three dismounted to aid their fallen commander, who was still lying with his leg under the dead mustang. He tried to walk, but sunk to the earth with a roar of pain, shaking his strong hand at the rocks where his enemies had found shelter.

"Up there, you cowards!" he shrieked. "I can not lead you. I think my leg is broken."

"That was Gid Granger who went first," said Ned, the Growler. "I know'd them long arms of his. He's no

chicken. I'll teach him to come into my camp, darn him."

"But that was your chum in front, Ned," said another of the men. "Brian Malcom shot the captain's hoss."

"He's broke his word, then," said Ned, angrily. "See ef I save him ag'in when I get a chaince."

"No he hain't," said the other. "None of us ever tried to go up the mountain thar. That's one of Gid's tricks, bet yer life."

"I shouldn't wonder. He's akal to it," grumbled Ned, keeping up his character as a growler. "Waal, Gid Granger or no Gid Granger, Malcom or no Malcom, I'm goin' up that mountain."

"Don't waste time chattering," moaned the captain, rubbing his leg. "I'd lead you if I could. You do it, Ned."

"Dismount," shouted Ned. "This way. I seen what they went up."

As they approached, Gid began a fire at them with his revolver, which brought blood from two of the foremost, Ned the Growler among the number. One of the balls pierced his hand, giving it a very painful wound, which drew a howl of rage from him.

"I kain't climb. Darn him, he shot me that way a-purpose; I know he did. Up, ye devils, up!"

The men began to clamber up the steep sides of the mountain, when Gid began a strange attack upon them, in which he was aided by Brian. The platform on which they stood was covered with loose stones, from the size of an egg to a sixty-pound shot. Gid began to roll these stones down the mountain one after the other, directing them at the climbers. In doing this, he merely lifted them to the top of the point at the rock behind which he was concealed, and hurled them down. Shouts of rage announced that the outlaws did not relish this new mode of attack.

"Ho-ay!" shouted Gid. "Give it to the condemned critters. Make it lively for 'em."

Brian seconded him in the effort, and a perfect broadside of stones rolled down the mountain side. It was all the scoundrels could do to keep out of the way of these dangerous missiles without climbing, and they stopped in mid career,

watching the coming stones and preparing to dodge when they threatened to come too near. As it was, one or two received awkward bruises from the heavy messengers, and finally they began to retreat, and did not feel safe until they reached the base of the mountain and ran out some paces.

"Hi—yip!" shouted Gid. "Did ye see that? Mout be I wouldn't make no great shakes of a General, an' mout be I would! 'Twon't be an easy job to take this yer fort."

"Had we not better climb to the top of the crevice before they recover from the confusion into which your strange assault has thrown them?" said Brian.

"Right, you ar'," said Gid. "Up with you ez quick ez you kin. I want to throw one stone at a pizon critter I see down thar. The skin's all off his back, but I'd like a piece off his head."

"Tom Dayton?"

"Bet ye. That identikle cuss has brung the inimy back on us. Thar; I see him. Gimme that big stan."

Gid showed himself for a moment defiantly on the face of the rock and threw the stone at Tom Dayton, who tried to dodge, but too late. The stone struck him on the nose, broke the bridge, knocked out two of his front teeth and disfigured him for life.

"Wonder how he likes it?" howled Gid, dancing in a frantic manner upon the rocks. "Teach him to foller old Gid Granger."

"Zip! zip!" The bullets began to hiss by him, and one cut a furrow on his right arm. Gid darted back, and followed his companion hastily to the top of the crevice.

"Now look hyar," said Gid. "I don't run no farther, not a foot. Thar's only one way for them critters to git at us, an' I'd engage to keep back five hundred men from gettin' at us here, unless they go round into Dead Man's Gulch an' clear my path. I don't b'lieve they know it, nyther. Oh, let me have a peep at that Tom Dayton. I mashed his nose all over his face."

A little stream ran through the valley, the same which passed in front of the "ranch" of Gid. These valleys, like a string of pearls, are found all along the mountain streams of this wild region. Tom Dayton had taken off his mask,

and, kneeling upon the bank of the stream, washed the blood from his disfigured face.

"Oh, see the mean cuss," said Gid, whose wrath seemed especially directed against the unfortunate. "I hope he'll relish his vittals arter what we've give him lately. I really an' truly hope he will! Blame my cats ef I ain't tickled nigh almost to death. Kain't I throw pooty straight?"

"I should not like to have you exercise your skill on me," replied Brian. "Look out. Some of those men are good marksmen and you may get a shot if you don't take care."

"I got teched jest now," replied Gid. "Got a piece of rag round you? One of them critters cut a little crease in my arm."

Gid had stripped off his hunting-shirt and was looking at his brawny arm, where the bullet had plowed its way from wrist to elbow. It was not a deep wound, however, though it promised to be an annoying one. Gid took the handkerchief which Brian handed him, coolly tore it into strips and wrapped it about the wounded arm, pinning it fast. He always carried a long row of pins in the cape of his hunting-shirt. While Brian aided him the dog stood by with a sagacious air watching the performance with interest.

"Look at the durned dorg," said Gid. "He seems to know I've got barkeled. 'Twas my own foolishness. I orter 'a' knowed better myself. Howsomever, least said soonest mended. 'Tain't much of a wound, anyhow."

When the wound was dressed they rose cautiously and looked down into the valley. Some of the outlaws were assisting the captain to reach the fire. By his actions it would seem that his limb gave him intense pain. Azalia was standing by the fire near the place where they had left her, but walked hastily out to meet her father, and seemed to offer her aid. But he repulsed her, and she went back to the fire and stood in a dejected attitude, her beautiful eyes cast down.

"No use to look now," grumbled the ranger. "They won't try us ag'in, you know. Cuss 'em, they got enough of it before. Teach 'em to fool with me on my own mountain! Wonder how they like the fusilade?"

"I don' think it skits them at all," said the young man.

"I am on thorns. What have we gained by this midnight raid? We have lost our horses and you are hurt."

"Don't you worry yourself about me. Wonderful healin' flesh I've got. Ef you was to cut me in two an' then stick the pieces together I'd grow so in less than half an hour. I would, by Canaan! That minds me of a medicine my father used to have, leastways my grandfather. Blow a man into pieces no bigger than your finger, and a single drop applied to an individual fragment would collect the other fragments instanter, and thar would start up a new man, like a bedbug armed for war. Yes, it would! Wal, my father he had some, and he used to give it to me reg'lar, and thafs the reason my flesh grows so mighty fast when I git scratched."

"Have you got any of that wonderful medicine now?" said Brian.

"Dead loads of it," replied the trapper.

"You had better give me some to guard me against the ills that flesh is heir to."

"I'd like to," answered Gid, "but unfortunately for all consarned it kain't go out of the fam'ly. If you git cut in two I promise to apply a portion to your frame, and fix you up right smart. 'Tain't no use to stay here though. The moon will go down in an hour, and when it goes down them 'furnal thieves will come a-chargin' an' a swarmin' up these yer cursed rocks and give us goodness gracious mixed with hail Kolumby, an' I don't feel as ef I wanted none."

Brian took up his rifle with a sigh and followed the old guide into another mountain path, different from the one which they had entered before. Once in a while the mountaineer glanced at his young companion and saw that he looked moody.

"Now, don't you fret, young 'un," said Gid. "Every thing in this yer life of ours turns out for the best. A minit ago you said it was a bad thing we cum out on this raid. I say it's the best thing that ever happened. S'pose we'd 'a' stayed? Giles Markham would 'a' come down on us with his cursed lossmen an' cut us into inch pieces. You'd 'a' liked that I know! Most any one would. Then we got a chance to lick that traitor feller, ar' thafs a gain. Then, you had a

talk with your gal, an' that's another gain; so, between 'em all, we've got the best of it. Then for forty dollars I wouldn't hev lost the chaince to throw them stuns."

"You look on the best side of every thing, Gid," said the young man.

"Course I do! That's the proper way, I allow. We've lost our losses. Wal, we'd prob'ly 'a' lost them anyhow, an' our lives, too, ef we'd stuck by the valley. That boy know's runs in my head. The little spider-legged cuss came there for our good, arter all. Wish I c'u'd see him ag'in, by gracious."

"I took a fancy to the youngster, too. His audacity was wonderful, but his bright face atoned for that. I hope he will come to no harm."

"Mout be Giles Markham found him out, an' ef he did, good-by to the sharp lad! He's down in a hole, sure. I wish we c'u'd find him. Thar; we've gone fur enough. Le's sit down here on this rock. Whar d'ye think we be now?"

"I don't know."

"Then look here."

Gid pointed through a crevice in the rock, and, to the young man's astonishment, he saw the fire surrounded by the outlaws, the figure of Azalia, and the horses in the background.

"How is this? Have you pursued a roundabout course and come back to the same point?"

"Not a izackly. We are on the other side of the mountain now, whar we'll stay. I don't give up this job, by no manner of means. Why should I? 'Tain't the first time Giles Markham hev balked me 'fore now, cuss him. I'd like to know who that man is, an' why my friend hated him so. Strain it is, they hated one another deadly. See that black rock over thar?"

"Yes."

"Wal, tharby hangs a tale. I hunted the most stupendous beast thar, 'bout eight year ago, you ever see. I'll tell you 'bout it. You've book-larnin', an' know all 'bout the animals that used to live on the airth 'fore our time. Thought they was all gone, I s'pose, but they wa'n't, not by one that I know on. Wal, I cum up here on a hunt arter small

game, an' Bruiser was with me. When I was comin' round the p'int of that rock thar, I heard Bruiser growl, an' I rushed in, an' I'll be darned ef he hadn't treed one of them Mastodons."

"What?"

"Mastodon's the name. Not treed him, either, but corra him on that rock, and thar the dorg stood, a-growlin' at him, the 'tarnal critter. He was eatin' stuns like grass, an' he was 'bout ez big ez the meetin'-house down to Selkirk. I'd never tackled that kind of an animile afore, but I 'sicked' Bruiser on, an' he took that Mastodon by the nose. The critter lifted up his head, an' ef the Mastodon looked like a church, old Bruiser looked like the bell. I laffed—I couldn't help it, to see old Bruiser hang onto that nose. He looked some like a wart on it, too. I hauled off an' let drive at Masty, an' he sort o' switched his tail, ez much ez to say, 'That kind o' tickled.' I had an old-fashioned musket them times, that would kerry either balls or slugs. I blazed away at the critter till my ammunition was peedy nigh gone, an' I got so wretched mad I didn't know what to do. I took out what slugs I had—eight or nine, an' three bullets—an' slapped an all-fired charge into the barrel an' primed her. Tinks I, 'Ef I don't tickle you this time, then I quit you, for a great, orkard, missable brute.' So I let her hev it. Blessed Cannan! For a minnit I 'magine'd the mountain was severed in twain, an' I see more stars than you kin see in the sky at night, a-flashin' an' a-winkin', an' a-tumblin' all round me, an' cuttin' across each other in the 'mazin'est way you ever hern tell of. You'd 'a' laffed to see me git up after a minnit with my shoulder out o' j'int, two back teeth knocked out, my 'aw all loose, an' wabblin' round like a kite in a gale o' wind, an' gw'arin' fit to spile a church. I ain't much of a soldier, generally speakin', but ef they set down counts ag'in' a man in the books of the recordin' angel, thar's the biggest string arter my name you ever hern tell of, I was so wretched mad. But that wa'n't the wust of it. When I got so I could see, that cussed Mastodon had put Bruiser up on his back, an' was eatin' rock ag'in as ef nothin' had happened, an' the old dorg was runnin' from his head to his tail, afraid to cum down. Just then Masty took it into his head to go, an' away

he went, takin' steps about twenty feet long. I got out of his way an' looked fur my gun, but I couldn't find a piece bigger than my hand. Bruiser he jumped off, the fust big rock they passed, an' run fur camp as ef he was chased by the devil."

Brian drew a long breath, and looked hard at this strange story-teller, who sat with an unmoved countenance.

"That is all?" said Brian.

"That's all."

"You never saw him again?"

"No; but they do say that some chaps chased him into a swamp down thar by Selkirk, an' he got drowned. They've got some of his bones in a big city in York State, an' make a great crow over 'em. I wish they only had seen him alive."

"Well, all I have got to say is that that is about the biggest"—Gid looked at him and breathed hard—"animal I ever heard of. Ha! what's that? Footsteps, as I live. Silence; let us see who comes."

CHAPTER X.

A TERRIBLE PURSUER.

They lay silent and waited. The footsteps seemed to come up the mountain side near them, and they crept into hiding-places among the rocks, just as a head appeared above the ledge, and a man crept into view. He was not masked, and they saw the bloody and distorted countenance of Tom Dayton. Gid had no idea of the terrible force of the blow he had given him, and it was all he could do to keep down his delight as he saw the well-deserved punishment the man had received. He had prided himself upon his comeliness before, but it was gone forever. His nose beaten out of shape, his teeth gone, and a terrible gash which, when healed, would leave a disfiguring scar, crossed his upper lip and reached nearly to his ear. He sat down on a rock and panted for

breath. Another step was heard, and another head appeared above the rocks, and Brian recognized the form as that of Ned the Growler.

"Ugh," said Ned. "There we are, companions in misfortune, both marked by that Gid Granger. Yit, I kain't help likin' the feller, the trick was so cussid cute. I never was in sech a shower before, in all my life. He mout hev shot me through the heart instid of the hand, ef he was a mind to."

"So, you do not hate him even now," hissed Tom Dayton.

"Not me! Why should I? He was defendin' his own life; and, ez fur you, why, you only got your deserts."

"Take care!" said Dayton, rising. "I hate this man so bitterly that his death in any common way can not atone for the misery he has brought upon me. Beaten like a dog first, and then disfigured for life."

"What's that to a mountain-man. Your nose is good enough for all practickle purposes; you kin blow it yit, when it gits well enuff. 'Twouldn't do fer ye to sneeze now, though."

"Curse you, do you dare to make a sport of my misfortunes? My face is ruined. How can I come to Azalia now and ask her to marry me, maimed and distorted as I am?"

Ned the Growler laughed heartily, and slapped his companion on the shoulder. "Why, you poor devil, did ye think Azalia would *ever* care fur you? Now, don't that beat all natur'? Why, she cares more fur Brian Malecom's little finger than she does fur your hull body. 'That I'll sw'ar to."

"Do you know that to be true?"

"Course I do. Why, she'd marry me afore she would you, but, I ain't sech a durned fool as to ask her. I hope you won't be."

Dayton uttered a cry like a mad beast and lunged himself upon the speaker, knife in hand. Ned threw up his wounded hand and warded off the point from his heart, at the expense of a wound in the forearm. But, staggering back from the shock, he stumbled over a stone and fell prostrate, with his enemy on top. In falling, his head struck a stone and he lay

stunned and senseless at the mercy of his enemy. Tom Dayton seemed a fiend. With his knee pressed hard upon the bosom of the fallen man and his knife in his grasp, a demonic light crossed his savage face and he reared the dandy weapon high.

Thud!

The iron-bound butt of Gid Granger's rifle dropped upon the head of Dayton, and he fell bleeding beside the man he would have slain. Ned the Growler half rose when he saw his rescuer, and would have fled, but Gid Granger gently placed his hand upon his breast and held him down.

"Critter," he said, "I don't have the fortin to know your face, but, this much I do know, you ain't got a bad heart under that rough hide, an' will keep a promise. Ef I let ye up, ye won't undertake to do no mischief, will ye now?"

"Not a bit of it," replied Ned. "I'm kind o' dazed. I dunno what to think."

"Waal, he did give ye an unnatural kind o' rap," replied Gid, grinning. "Git up, feller-critter. How d'ye feel?"

"Rather giddy, ef I must say it. What in thunder made Tom Dayton fly at me that way? He tuk me by surprise so to speak, or I'd 'a' give him *seck* a rap."

"I guess he got it anyhow," replied Gid. "I didn't light onto him much in the natur' of a feather. Thar; take a turn of a leint on his wrists an' feet. Here's them pieces we cut this mornin'. I've got 'em handy."

Brian obeyed the order and Tom Dayton lay helpless.

"What ye goin' to do with us, strangers?" said Ned the Growler. "Seems to me I've seen ye before."

"Them that knows me po'ly well call me Gid Granger. When ther very partic'lar friends they call me Gid. I dare any one to call me 'mister.'"

"Waal," said Ned, evilently pleased. "You durned critter, 'twas you give me this yer ke psake."

He held up his wounded hand.

"Sho'ldn't be a bit s'prised ef I did," replied Gid. "I'm liable to it sometimes, and I shoot mighty keerless sometimes. I'd rather hit any other man in the party though."

"Then ye ain't sot ag'inst me, Gid?"

"Nary time. Yer the only man in that party that's got a

heart. I was scoutin' when ye was goin' to shoot down my friend hyar, down in Dead Man's Gulch, an' heard ye speak up like a man."

"Is that Brian?" said the Growler, eagerly. "I'm pesky glad ye got away, boy. I never was so tickled in all my life ez I was when I seen ye goin' down the pass like the wind, fur I know'd that thar wasn't a hoss in the party could run Abdallah down. Wouldn't mind shakin' hands with me, would yer?"

"I am glad to do it," replied Brian, "and can not express my thanks to you, or my happiness in being able to repay you in some degree for your goodness yesterday."

"Had a lively time sence then, I reckon," said Ned, shaking hands warmly. "Say; hadn't yer better git up an' git? Giles Markham will use ye mighty rough ef he gets ye."

"Yaas," said Gid. "I s'pose he will. "But, ef he don't git us, he kain't misuse us. It does beat all natur' to see a man like you one of this cussid gang."

"'Tis rough," said Ned. "But what kin I do? They've got me hard and fast. Half the gang are tired of it, but they're 'fraid of the capt'in. I ain't. But, long as the rest ar', I can't do nothing. Any one of 'em would put a knife into me ef the capt'in said it. Goin' to take me prisoner?"

"Not unlest you jine us willin'," replied Gid. "We ain't got no call to keep the only man that's a friend to us in all that heathen gang. Ef they catch us, you mout be able to help us some."

"Shoul'n't wonder," said Ned. "I wish I's a free trapper ag'in, featin' no man, workin' hard for an honest livin', instid of bein' the left-hand man of Giles Markham. He don't trust me, though, sence Brian got away."

"Well, git along," said Gid. "Leave Tom Dayton her an' send somebody up for him. He ain't scribble yit, as I kin see."

Ned the Growler touched the body with his foot, but Dayton showed no signs of life. "I reckon you give it to him harder than you meant, boss," he said. "That ain't a weak arm you've got."

"Contriarywise, I judge," said Gid, stretching his muscular figure to its full height. "But say, hadn't we better tie you?"

Then you kin holler like a loon an' bring up yer friends. Ye needn't hurry about it."

"That's a cute trick," chuckled the Growler. "Yes, tie me—tie me, an' then git away as quick as you kin."

They tied him rather loosely, and catching up their weapons, hurried away in the darkness. Fifteen minutes after, when Dayton began to show signs of life, Ned the Growler began to yell in a way which would have done credit to an Apache Indian. It roused the camp below, and the outlaws came trooping up the rocks in the direction of the sound, with lighted torches. They found Ned still yelling frantically, and Dayton moaning in pain. Ned, when released, swore roundly at those who had tied him, cursing Gid Granger in particular until all was blue. Giles Markham had by this time recovered, and found that his hurts amounted to nothing but a bruise, and followed his men to the place where Ned was making the air resound with his cursing.

"Cease your clamorous tongue," cried Giles, angrily. "Who was it tied you?"

"Gid Granger," roared Ned. "Blast him," he added, parenthetically.

Giles Markham turned and spoke to one of the men. "Go down and loose Terror," he said, savagely, "and bring him up to me. I will run these two scoundrels to the earth to-night or know the reason why. Get torches, the rest of you, and prepare to follow me."

While the notes of preparation resounded on every hand, Markham hastily descended and found Azalia standing at the foot of the bluff, eagerly awaiting him.

"What is the matter, father?" she said.

"Matter; the devil is let loose. Gid Granger is in the mountains and has nearly killed Tom Dayton and tied Ned the Growler neck and heels. That young hound whom I so hate, that traitor to his vows, Brian Maleom, is with him. This very night I will have them both, and woe to them when they fall into my hands."

"Father!" cried Azalia, "you frighten me when you speak in that way."

"How else should I speak of a traitorous hound like that? Azalia, if I thought you cared for him, I—"

"You would not harm me, father?"

"No, but I would make that young ruffian repent ever having met you. Enough; this is my work, and with it you have nothing to do. Girl, you do not know what cause I have to hate this Brian Malcom. Perhaps some day when you understand me, you will forgive me. For, cruel as I have been to others, I have loved you tenderly, Azalia."

"I know it, father, but for that I could not have endured the life in which you have bred me. What is Stanton doing? Look, look, he is bringing out Terror."

"I know it," said her father, grimly. "Do you think they can escape from him? Let them run and double as much as they like in the darkness, Terror will find them out."

"Father, you will not loose that dreadful hound upon their track?"

"Will I not? Away, girl! I believe that my fears have not deceived me, and that you love this Brian Malcom. Speak, mad girl; did you see him to-night?"

"I did," she said, faintly.

"Oh, curse him! I will make this so bitter to him that he shall wish he had never been born! Bring out the dog, I say! Why do you dally, you worse than useless knaves? Ha! that is Terror. He hears my voice."

Two men appeared from the darkness, dragging by the collar a huge dog, larger than Bruiser, whose powerful frame and hanging lips showed that he was one of the fierce breed of the Siberian bloodhound. He was wild by confinement and tugged frantically at the strong chains by which the two men dragged him.

"Terror!" said Markham, in a commanding voice. The fierce brute ceased his struggles and crouched at the feet of his master, ready to obey the hand which had tamed him. Fierce and untractable with others, the slightest word from the lips of Markham could subdue him in his most savage moods.

"Ha!" said Markham. "This is well. The brute is in good trim for work. Loose him."

"But, capt'in," said the man called Stanton, "he is that wild and savage to-night that I don't think it safe."

"Coward. Give me the key! Do you think I can not restrain him?"

The man obeyed meekly, and retreated to a safe distance, while Markham stooped and unlocked the heavy chains by which the hound was tied, while the dog looked up at him in a submissive way.

"Father," said Azalia, clasping her hands, "if you love me, do not go out with that terrible brute in search of those innocent men."

"Innocent! Now by all things holy and pure, you try me almost beyond my strength. Innocent! If the devils in the lowest pit are innocent, so are Gid Granger and his worthy helpmeet, Brian Malcom. Come, Terror!"

The dog rose from his crouching attitude and submissively followed his master. But his red eyes glared, and it was plain that he was eager to follow the trail of the prey.

"Into the house, Azalia, and say no more. You only make it worse for this fellow when I run him down."

Azalia threw up her hands and fell fainting, and this strange man, savage to all others, turned quickly back and raised her in his arms.

"Call your wife out, Stanton," he said. "I must leave this foolish child in her care."

"Let me take her in," said Stanton. "You take care of the dog. He ain't safe."

Markham relinquished the fainting girl, but hesitated a moment, as if he would have followed them. But a growl from the dog drew his attention, and turning, he hurried up the broken sides of the valley, and gained the ledge upon which Ned, the Growler, and others of the band remained. The dog scented the blood, and raising his muzzle in the air, uttered a dolorous howl. Markham seized him by the neck, and taking out a pouch which Brian had worn the day before, and which had remained upon the saddle-bow of Abdallah, he allowed the hound to get the scent. Then the dog ran round and round upon the place where Brian and the trapper had walked, and at last turned into the trail they had followed in their hasty flight. Waving their torches in the air, the outlaws followed the voice of the hound, who, baying fiercely, sprung quickly out of sight.

"Curse the dog," muttered Ned the Growler. "He'll tree 'em, sure! I wish I could get a lick at him."

But the hound was gone, and after him, stumbling over the rocks, through the narrow defiles, and under branching pines, the outlaws ran—Giles Markham and Ned the Growler leading the van, the captain forgetting his bruised leg in his desire to run down the fugitives.

The deep voice of the hound came rolling back to them as they ran, and they knew that the scent was plain. On, on, their torches flaring, shouting to each other as they lost their way, the outlaws pursued the hunt which is the greatest passion with the more brutish among men—the hunt of their fellow-men.

“Hear him give tongue,” cried Markham, as he bounded on, side by side with Ned the Growler. “Is it not a noble beast?”

“He is at fault,” replied the man, eagerly. “He tries back; do you not hear?”

The deep baying of the dog was changed to an occasional yelp, as if he were at fault, but the next moment he gave tongue again, more fiercely, more loudly than before. Then he seemed to turn to the right, and they hurried on, until they reached the mouth of a narrow pass leading up the mountain. By this time the dog was half a mile ahead, and raised one wild, savage note which told them that he had reached his prey! Then, a moment after, a sudden and strange silence fell.

“What’s that?” muttered Ned. “Why don’t he yell?”

“He is busy,” replied Markham, grimly. “When that hound closes on the prey, he works in silence. On, Ned: on!”

For fifteen minutes they stumbled on over the rocky way, when Ned fell over something which lay in his path. Starting up, he felt blood upon his hand, and saw the dead body of Terra, with a terrible wound in his head and a horribly mangled throat. He had good reason for his silence. How was it done?

CHAPTER XI:

IN DURESS.

GID hurried on over the path he knew so well, until the hoarse baying of the hound came to their ears through the deep recesses of the mountain. He knew what that meant but too well. A ferocious bloodhound—the fiercest of a savage tribe—was on his track. The trapper set his teeth hard, and muttered fiercely to himself: “May the black devils haunt him night and day, the base-hearted villain! Dare he hunt me like a slave in the free mountains?” When the sound came to their ears they were toiling up the narrow pass in which the body of the hound was found by Ned the Growler. He stopped short, and began to scrape up scattered leaves and pine boughs, and, lighting a match, kindled a fire hastily in the center of the pass.

“What are you doing?” said Brian.

“We must have light to fight with this fearful beast,” replied the old mountaineer. “He ain’t no sucker, that dog ain’t! I’d pit Bruiser ag’inst him in daylight, you know, but I kain’t say I’d like to try it on in the night. Hear him howl, the big devil! Listen to that, Bruiser!”

The appearance of the dog was strange. His eyes seemed to scintillate sparks of fire. His bristles stood erect; and, but for the voice of his master, he would have bounded down the rocks to meet the coming hound. But, as the fire blazed up, GID caught him by the neck and held him, kneeling by his side and waiting for the right moment to loose him. Brian would have drawn a pistol, but the trapper stopped him.

“Let me do this yer, Brian. Don’t you put in at all. I’ll teach the ‘fannelly mean skunks to loose a hound on me! I wouldn’t do that to a human critter, by tarnation. Now you bet I wouldn’t. Thar he comes.”

As he spoke the bloodhound bounded out into the circle of light, and crouched like a panther about to make his leap.

The foam was dropping from his black lips and his teeth showed fiercely in the light of the fire.

"At him!" roared his master.

The two great beasts came together with mighty force, fierce, implacable. As far as size was concerned they were nearly matched, but, besides the blood which he held in common with the pure hound, Bruiser had that tenacity of purpose and great determination which he took from his mastiff blood. They closed with a roar like lions, and the powerful jaws of Bruiser closed upon the throat of his antagonist. They reared to their hind feet, pressed each other up and down, while the hound strove in vain to shake off the vice-like gripe of the mastiff. Up and down the hard pass they struggled, while the mountaineer, drawing his hatchet, ran in to end the conflict. But that they were pressed for time, he would have waited to give his dog a chance to beat the hound unaided; but he could hear the shouts of the coming outlaws, and their lights began to gleam in the distance. At length the dogs stood up again, and the hatchet was buried to the hilt in the forehead of the hound, who dropped dead in his tracks just as the flesh and skin by which Bruiser held him gave way and left a ghastly wound.

"Good dog!" said old Gid. "I know'd ef ye had a grip a him once you'd never loose yer hold till the piece come out. Let him alone, Bruiser. These fellers are closing in!"

They once more addressed themselves to flight, hurrying up the narrow pass. The ranger had snatched up a brand to light the way, and as it showed the lofty walls about him a despairing look came into his face.

"Eternal cats," he growled. "We ar' in a trap, we be. By gracious, I guess our cake is all dough now."

"What do you mean?"

"Mean jest what I say, Brian. I've led ye into a trap in the dark. Look here! Three hundred feet of perpendicular wall on every side, an' thar's the end of the pass. I reckon we've got to go under, young 'un."

Brian looked ahead and saw their peril. The pass came suddenly to an end, and up its sides not even a cat could have climbed with safety. It was singularly smooth in every part, and no trees of any height grew in the pass. "Come,"

said Gid. "I judge this ends it. Now let's decide. Will ye stand here in the pass an' fight it out, or give up an' trust to luck?"

"I leave that with you."

"Thar ain't much choice." They can't more'n kill us, anyhow, an' mebbe we'll git a chance to escape, ef we're lucky; so I move we give up."

"I am willing. At least it will give me a chance to see Azalia again. Here they are."

Torches gleamed in front, and they saw that only Ned the Growler and Giles Markham had come into the pass. "Let's make one dash," whispered Gid. "I don't see any more than these. Ned won't hurt us ef he kin kelp it, an' ef we kin git out of the durned pass I'll trouble 'em to ketch us, that's all!"

Springing suddenly out of the covert, they rushed upon the two outlaws as they were bending over the dead body of the hound. Giles Markham went down under a blow from the flat of the hatchet which Gid still kept in his hand. Brian struck Ned, but so lightly that it would not have injured a fly, yet that individual dropped as if struck by a slung-shot, and lay on his back, smiling placidly, while the hunted men bounded over their bodies and rushed down the pass. As they did so, Giles Markham raised himself and fired his pistol after them. Gid heard a moan of pain, and stopping, saw that his companion had sunk upon one knee. The hastily aimed bullet had been too truly sent, and struck Brian on the ankle; and, without breaking the bone badly, had so splintered it as to make further flight impossible.

"Run for it," he said. "I am done for, Gid. You may yet escape."

"That's a matter of taste," replied Gid. "I don't hanker after escapin' jest now. I judge I'll stay by ye."

"This is foolish, Gid," pleaded the wounded man. "You can aid me more at liberty than you can as a prisoner."

"You won't call it deserting a friend ef I go?" he said, eagerly. "I'll save you, or lie with ye."

"Away! Waste no time in words."

"Too late," replied Gid. "Them outlaws are in the pass now. I'll hev to stay with ye, I guess. Come here, old

Bruiser. I judge I'd better tie ye, or mebbe you'll want a piece out of one of them chaps, and that won't do, you know."

Just as he had passed the chain about the neck of the dog, the enemy closed in on them from two sides, uttering shouts of joy as they saw that the friends were in the toils.

"Secure them quickly," said Giles Markham, eagerly. "By heaven, this is greater luck than I expected. Up, you snaky dog!" He struck the wounded man with the palm of his hand.

"Mebbe you call it a han'sum thing to strike a wounded man, mister outlaw," said Gid; "but I allow it is right down dirty, cowardly, thievin' business. My name's Gid Granger. Now what mout you want with me?"

"You will find that out, quickly enough, Gid Granger," replied the captain. "You scoundrel, you know well that for the sake of him whose grave you guarded, or rather for the sake of those of his blood, I spared you, though you took every pains to villify my name whenever you had an opportunity. You have forced me to make an end of you."

"Draw it mild, capt'in. Now, what hev I *done*?"

"Did you not sneak into my camp to-night?"

"Kan't say about the sneakin'. Is thar any thin' ag'in' comin' into a camp? I didn't hurt nobody, an' I didn't steal nothin'. You was at my ranche the same night. Kin *you* say the same?"

It was a hard hit. Giles Markham knew that the house of the old trapper was in ruins, and that his men had stolen every available thing they could lay their hands on.

"That is not all. You wounded several of my men, and your companion shot my horse, a valuable animal, and nearly crushed me by the fall. How do you account for that?"

"Waal, ef I see fifteen or twenty men a-comin' at me with their weepens leveled, howlin' like pizon sarpints, I nat'rally take to my heels. Ef they shoot at me, I give 'em as good ez they send. I did throw some stones, an' *that* wa'n't 'zactly fa'r."

"You have an excuse for every thing, sir. How was it that you knocked down two of my men an hour ago, and tied them neck and heels?"

"As to the tyin', I didn't want 'em straddlin' through the hills arter me; an' ef I knocked the first man down, it was to save him from puttin' a knife into the gizzard of one of yer own men. Thar he is now."

"Is that true, Ned?" demanded Giles.

"Frenchin' ain't true," said Ned, the Growler. "Ef this Gil Granger hadn't hit him, he'd 'a' choked my goose, sure enough."

"You killed my dog," said Markham, eager to make out a case against the trapper.

"D'ye see that hunk out of his throat? That ain't my work, but my dog's. I only put him out of pain. 'Baker, I've a notion that ef my dog was to come at you like a tearin' lion, you'd be likely to hit him."

"We want a time," said Markham. "Make a litter of pine boards, an' put this wounded man in it. We must take him to camp. I would not have him die yet."

A litter was hastily constructed, and Brian was laid on it. Six men bore it over the rough path, and others went in front with the dogs. Half an hour's walk brought them to the outlaws' valley. One of the men, who had some knowledge of surgery, looked at his wound. His treatment was simple. With a common knife he picked out the bits of broken bone, and threw them away, and then washed the wound in spirits of some kind, made a rude set of splints and bound up the wounded ankle. This done, they carried him into one of the huts and laid him on a rough bed.

"Take it easy, Brian," whispered Ned the Growler, as he bent over the bed. "Thar's some here won't see ye injured. *Trust to me!*"

Brian gave him a look of gratitude, for this was not the first time Ned the Growler had shown him kindness. They went out and left him alone, and he lay tossing restlessly on his rude bed, wondering what had been the fate of his brave companion, and thinking feverishly of Azalia, and that she ought to be at his bedside. As he lay there, the door was pushed open and some one came in with a light. It was Giles Markham, still masked.

"I wish I could see that face," muttered the wounded man. "I would give a year of my life for that object."

Markham set the light upon a low wooden shelf at the head of the bed, and drew a stool close to it. He looked steadily at the form of the man who lay there, and there was a look of triumph in his eyes.

"So, my young friend, all your rambling has come to a sudden end? One day and part of a night was all you could keep out of my clutches. Ha! ha. ha!"

"You came to insult me while I lie here wounded," said Brian. "Oh, coward, coward."

"Umph! I don't think I am a coward, but you drive me almost mad. Young man, you do not know what cause I have to hate you and your whole race. Come, you shall tell me why you came into this region, and if you tell me the truth, and prove to me that you are not the man I thought you, I will not only let you go free, but will atone in every possible way for the wrong I have done you."

"Why should I tell you the story?" said Brian. "It is nothing to you."

"It may avail you somewhat if you tell it truly. Why did you come here?"

"In search of a friend."

"What was that friend's name?"

"Phillip Raymond."

"There! I knew I could not be mistaken. The foul fiend light upon him! Could he not rest in quiet without drawing another into the same danger? I shall go mad if I talk of it. Did you find him, then?"

"Not yet," replied Brian.

"What led you to suppose he was in the northern trapping-ground?"

"He purchased an outfit at Leavenworth, and hired four men to accompany him. They took the trail across the plains, and since that time he has never been heard of."

"Nor any of the men?"

"No."

"So, you undertook the Quixotic work of searching for him? You will never find him. I alone can tell you the fate of Phillip Raymond, and I would see you rot alive before I would speak a word."

"You are a fiend, not a man," said Malcom, sternly. "I

will not do my race the dishonor of believing you of the order of Adam. You are one to nurse an injury through long years, and even let it follow the object of your resentment to the grave, and hate even the memory of the dead. I do not know whether Phillip Raymond is yet above the sod; perhaps he is dead. If so, my mission ends here."

"It does indeed! And, because I know this to be so, look upon my face and tell me whether or no it is the face of a man made so by nature or by a cruel wrong."

He loosened the strings of his mask, and suffered it to fall. The young man looked at him in silent amazement. He saw a man in the prime of life, with a pale, handsome face, deep-blue eyes, and clustering rings of brown hair—the face of a man born to control others, to be a power among his kind. But God, who sets his mark upon all faces, had marked that fair brow with lines of care which should not have been there. In that face Brian Malcom read either a noble nature gone astray, or that this was a fair mask given to hide a villain's heart. The utter wonder in the face of the wounded man seemed to strike Markham, for he turned away his head.

"You have not spoken yet," he said, half fiercely. "Is this the face of a natural villain? I know I have done the deeds of one, but, can you read it in my face?"

"No," replied Brian.

"It is the heart, it is the heart that speaks!" said the man, slowly. "Now, once more to business. I know your heart, young man. That is an open book to me, and I read there that you love Azalia. Is not this true?"

"It is."

"Then let me say to you that I would sooner see her laid in her grave, deeply as I love her, than see her married to my friend of Phillip Raymond. Do you understand me?"

"I hear you," replied the young man, quietly. "Do you not hate me for another cause?"

"No; I hate you for your name. The Raymonds and Malcoms have been hand and glove for many years, and I felt a presentiment, from the first, that you were of the same family I hated. Yes, I would sooner marry her to that scarred and disfigured wretch you beat with knotted ropes to-day than to you. Enough; while you are suffering this pain

I will do you no injury. But, when you are well, if you do not swear upon the Book, whose teachings you profess to follow, to leave the North-west, and never again set foot north of the Nebraska, upon this side of the Rocky Mountains, I will hang you up for the crows to pick at."

He rose, put on his mask and left the room, while Brian lay in a maze, trying to think what there was in this man's face to remind him of other days. While he lay there, drowsiness came upon him and he slept. The daylight streaming through the lattice of pine strips before the window was falling on his face when he awoke and looked about him. He was not alone, for there, sitting upon the stool which Markham had left, and looking sadly down upon his upturned face, was the boy who had warned him of danger at Gid Granger's ranche—Flit.

"Hush," said he, as the young man turned with a start toward him. "I have come to watch by you. *She* sent me; you know who I mean."

CHAPTER XII.

A LIVING TOMB.

GID GRANGER was thrust into one of the huts and heavily ironed. Wherever they had obtained them, he found to his cost that the manacles were strong and good, and that it was useless to try and break out. Being a man accustomed to rough usage, he managed to spend the rest of the night in profound sleep. The dog, which none of the outlaws cared to meddle with, lay at his feet through the night, and growled savagely whenever the guard outside peeped in to see that his prisoner was secure. When morning broke Gid woke refreshed, and was ready for any thing which fortune had in store for him. He greeted the man who brought in his breakfast in such a good-natured way that the outlaw had great difficulty in keeping up a severe expression of countenance.

"Any thing new this mornin', stranger?" said Gid, good-naturedly, as he threw a bone to Bruiser, who retreated with it to one corner of the hut and gnawed it at his ease.

"Not as I knows on," replied the fellow, morosely. "What did ye want to come foolin' round this camp fer, Gid Granger? Ye know what we ar'."

"Set of consarned critters, ain't ye?" said Gid. "Kanni mes, you be. Ain't hungry this mornin', be ye?"

"Not very."

"Thort not. Ye don't look like it, nohow. Consarn my pieter ef I ain't beat about you chaps. Never thought ye'd pile on to old Gid Granger in this onnateral way. You understand?"

"Don't soap me, Gid Granger! I'm too tough. Try it on the capt'in, or Ned, the Growler, or some of them feilers. 'Tain't nat'ral to think ye kan come it over a critter like me."

"Didn't want to come it over ye, critter. Who said I did? How ye do rile up, you chaps! Never see sech on-nateral critters in my born days. Say; what's the use of keepin' me tied up? I ain't used to it."

"Ain't ye? Then, I judge you'll hev to git used to it, somchow. I guess we'll find a place to put ye in, whar ye'll hev time to reflect on the error of yer ways. I dunno nothin' 'bout it, so don't ask me, *you!* Give them bones to the dog. Say; ef you go under, give that thar dog to me, won't ye?"

"I ain't gone un der," said Gid, stoutly.

"But ye *must*; now I only put it to ye fa'r. Ain't ye likely to go under, say?"

"I don't think it."

"But thar's a chaine," persisted the man.

"Yes; an' I want the dorg well used, so see here. You promise to take good keer of him ef I kick the beam, and you kin hev him."

"That's a go," replied the outlaw, and, gathering up his plates, he departed. Gid remained alone for an hour, and then Giles Markham entered the room, accompanied by half a dozen of his men, and these of the baser sort. They seized the old man roughly, put him on a horse, and, when mounted, tied his legs under the belly of the animal. Then

they sprung into the saddle, with Giles Markham at one side and a burly ruffian on the other, and rode out of camp.

"Ugh," muttered Ned, the Growler. "I know what that means. Poor Gid; I wish I could help him."

The guard accompanying Gid Granger turned into the only pass accessible to horsemen which led into the valley. It was devious and rough, and the old man noticed that the horsemen avoided all those spots which looked fairest to the eye, and he grinned expressively, for he knew that these spots were the ones under which lurked pitfalls and traps for the unwary feet. Half-way down the pass they halted and dismounted, leaving the trapper in the charge of two stout men, who held the bridle of his horse on either side.

"Untie his feet," said Markham.

One of the men drew a bowie and cut the lariat by which his feet were bound and assisted him to dismount rather roughly.

"See here," said Gid. "What ar' ye trying to do, you fellows?"

"You shall know soon enough," replied Giles Markham. "Drag him along, boys."

They pushed and pulled him by main force to a place where a deep black pit went down into the heart of the mountain. He struggled no more, but his deep eyes looked so lofty and bold, that even his captors felt a thrill of admiration.

"You see that hole, Gideon Granger?" said Markham, pointing downward.

"I'm lookin' at it," replied the other, with calm complacency. "Nice lookin' crevice, ain't it?"

"You are going down into it."

"Scuse me; I'd rather not."

"Couldn't we persuade you to go down?" said Markham, with a bitter laugh.

"Mebbe ye could, ef you was to try right hard," replied the trapper. "Must I jump down?"

"Oh, no; we'll give you a rope."

"Want to find out how deep it is, eh?" said Gid, cheerfully. "All right; I'm your man as far as that goes. Bring on your rope."

One of the men took from a crevice in the rock a stout rope, about thirty feet in length, and threw the end into the hole. As he did so Gid saw that the other end was securely fastened in the crevice.

"Go down," said Markham. "Don't make trouble, *you*."

Gid kneeled upon the edge of the pit and looked down, and could see the bottom dimly, and something white glimmering through the darkness. He felt a strange thrill pass through him, but Markham slowly drew a pistol from his belt and looked significantly at the rope.

"Wait a minnit," said the trapper. "I want to look my last upon the sun."

"I am glad you understand me," said the outlaw, grimly. "When you go down into that black pit, you go into your grave. To-day the 'Brothers of the League' leave this glen, never to return. What hope is left for you?"

The trapper said nothing, but looked up at the clear blue sky overhead and seemed to drink in the pure air of heaven. His broad breast heaved, but his face was firm and bold.

"This will teach you, vile spy, what it is to follow Giles Markham. The man you put to rest in your own valley—where I would have let you rest in peace if your sense had been great enough to teach you not to measure blades with me—was better off than you, for he did not linger. Your death will not be like his. Go down."

Gideon Granger seized the rope and slid down into the pit. The rope was drawn up, he heard a laugh of triumph, and then Giles Markham spoke again:

"Lie there amid the bones of those who, like you, dared to brave me, and die of hunger and thirst. When you are in agony, remember that the rope which could save you lies in this crevice and come out and take it. Ha! ha! ha!"

While the mocking laugh still rung in his ears, he heard the sound of retreating hoofs. He was alone, alone in the depth of blackness, amid the bones of the dead! For the smell of mortality still clung to the sides of the pit, and he knew that others, before his time, had fallen victims to the hate of Giles Markham. A cold shudder passed through him as he thought that he must die here, alone, of hunger and thirst.

He would not die. He clung like a cat to the sides of the pit and attempted to climb. In vain! The ooze of many years had made the walls thick with slimy matter, and neither foot nor hand could find any thing to cling to. He gave up the attempt in despair, and sunk down, with a low moan. There was something horrible to this man, who could have died calmly in battle, to know that his body must fester among these slimy bones, and go to decay in a spot where the grass could not grow. At every motion the white bones settled, and a skull at his feet seemed to grin at him. He started up again in horror and looked up, but changed his cry to one of joy, for he saw a human head framed between him and the sky.

"Are you there, Gid Granger? Speak if you live!"

"Yes, I am here. Let down the rope, for heaven's sake!" cried Gid, eagerly.

"Do you know me?" shrieked the voice above him. "Do you know Tom Dayton, the man you beat and scarred? Cry for mercy, do! Oh, it is a joy to me to see you there, among the moldering relics of the dead. Shall I let down the rope and help you up? Here!"

He dragged the rope from its place of concealment, and dangled it within a foot of the face of the unfortunate. Gid never looked at it. His gaze was fixed sternly upon the savage face of his enemy bent upon him from above. The man laughed like a very fiend and mocked him.

"Leave me," said Gid, sternly. "I've got to die here; that I know, but I won't beg life from you. I'd rather die this hideous death, cryin' for water out of the darkness, cravin' food night and day, than ask any mercy from you. I licked you like a dog; d'ye hear? What a fool you must be. Why don't you take a pistil an' shoot me? I would, ef I was you. Sp'iled that baby-face, did I? How sorry I be! It makes me laugh, by gracious, when I think what a handsome' man you be, an' how sure ye ar' to git Azalia to marry ye. Ha! ha! ha!"

Tom Dayton pointed a pistol at his head, and a strange smile crossed the brown face of the old mountainer. "It's the best way," he muttered. "Far the best. I couldn't bear to die in torment, when a single shot would put me out of pain."

Dayton knelt upon the verge of the pit, and pointed the weapon steadily. But, something in the eyes of the trapper warned him that this death would suit him better, and he replaced the pistol with the same hissing laugh.

"No, no, my man. You'd like that, wouldn't you? A sudden death instead of the lingering one. Why, man, it's enough to make a dog laugh to think of you there, trampling on the bones of those who went down before you. Bah! you are a fool to think I would kill you now, when I know well that it would only give you ease. Come, I think I'll leave you. But I'll come back; never fear. I'll come back, and stand upon the verge of the pit when you begin to howl for food and drink, and listen to you and laugh at your pain."

The rope, which had been dangling within a foot of the trapper's face, began to recede, and, as it came up, the man, still kneeling, coiled it about his wrist. When he had made one or two turns, Gid Granger made an upward bound and seized the rope in both hands. He had hardly hoped for success, but the rope ran tight upon the arm of the villain and dragged him down. Gid Granger crouched against the slimy wall, and the villain, with a horrible cry, and outspread hands, came swooping down into the pit and struck with a dull, crunching sound upon the bottom. His neck was broken by the fall and he lay dead at the feet of the man he would have mocked unto death. Gid lifted him, but his tongue hung out of his mouth and his head dropped helplessly. He had been caught in his own toils. Gid turned sick and covered his face with his hand, dropped his senses for a moment, and leaned against the slimy wall for support. It was over in a moment, and, grasping the rope firmly, he climbed quickly to the top and dragged himself out. As he did so, his heart sunk within him, for there, a few feet away, he saw the masked head of one of the outlaws peeping from behind a rock. He turned to run, but a well-known voice called him back. "Hold hard thar, Gid Granger! It's me."

It was that merry outlaw, Ned, the Growler. He came back and shook hands heartily with the old ranger.

"Glad to see ye, old man," he said. "I was jest goin' to give Tom Dayton 'one for his nob' when ye pulled him down. Darn him, he flew like a kite, didn't he?"

"Blast that place," said Gid. "I'd rather—yes, by gracious, I'd rather sleep in a den of live rattlesnakes, an' them ten foot long, then to go down into that thar place ag'in. Agh! It makes the flesh creep to think of them cussid bones."

"Is he dead?"

"*Julius Sezer* ain't deader. But then, it ain't much for a man of my fam'ly to be in sech a place, 'cause I had a cousin as was buried alive a matter of four days, an' he cum out of it alive an' hearty." Yes, he did."

"Isn't that putting it on *rather* strong?" said Ned, laughing

"Bet yer life it ain't! I'll tell ye somethin' about it some day when I don't feel so cussid weak. Then I'm wretched mad, too! Glorious Sezer, this yer is awful, this yer is! Yes, bet yer—Waal, that's enuff. Now, hev yer got sech a thing ez a drink of brandy 'round yer close?"

"I ain't got no brandy," said Ned. "But, I've got summat pooty nigh ez good, you know."

He produced a flask, and Gid took a hearty pull. His countenance brightened perceptibly, and he lowered the flask a moment.

"That's whisky, I'll bet a cooky," he said.

"That's just what it is, old man. Try ag'in; yer doin' mighty well."

Gid tried again; he tried two or three times, and when he put the flask down, his honest countenance was illuminated by the glow of courage. "I'm yer man, now, boys! What's the next thing on the bill? Oh! I'm goin' to walk rite into the camp an' clean out yer hull party, take away Brian Malcom and Azalia, and leave!"

"Come along," said Ned. "I'll help ye do it."

Gid looked at the outlaw and said nothing. Ned grinned expressively, and led the way at a quick step. To the surprise of the mountaineer, he led the way back toward the camp, avoiding the pitfalls and traps, and entered the valley. As they came in view, a joyful bark was heard, and Bruiser bounded to the side of his master and fawned upon him.

"The outlandish critter's actially glad to see me," he said, with a suspicious moisture in his eye. "Now, ain't that peccoliar?"

A surprise awaited him. The six men who had taken him to the pit were lying on the earth, tightly bound. The rest of the outlaws were standing about in groups, conversing eagerly, still wearing their masks. Gid nodded pleasantly, all round, with a perplexed smile, but Ned pushed open the door of the cabin and went in, Gid following. Brian was sitting on a stool, with his wounded foot lying on a pile of soft buffalo-ropes. Upon the bed lay Giles Markham, with a livid face, upon which the dews of death were settling fast. The moment Gid saw his face he started back with a cry of surprise.

"His brother! By the 'mortal, his own brother!"

Markham turned his head slowly, and evidently in pain. "I knew he would come," he moaned. "No pit is deep enough to keep you in. Are you satisfied? You have hounded me to my death. Well, it is over at last. I am the brother of the man whose grave you tended so carefully, all those weary months since I sent him to lie there. Listen, Azalia; listen, Brian Malcom, and I will tell you in a few words the story of my life."

Azalia, who had been sitting upon the robes at the feet of her lover, looked up quickly, and showed a beautiful face, a pair of brilliant eyes, suffused with tears. Gid looked at her and wondered where he had seen her before.

"My brother, Phillip Raymond—for it is Phillip Raymond who sleeps beneath the soil yonder—loved me little, even as a boy. In school, in college, everywhere I went, at every point, he crossed my path. I cursed him in those days, but when we came to love the same woman, I hated him more. He won her, as he always won every thing upon which I set my heart, and they were married. I left the country that I should not kill him, and wandered out to this wild region, where I learned its ways and made friends among the more turbulent spirits. I formed the plan of this party, to make its haunt among the mountains and prey upon mankind. Within a cave, yonder, we stowed away the peltries, furs and weapons we took, and sent them by wagon to various parts and sold them. We committed no murders in this nefarious traffic, for, as our men went masked upon all their raids, they could at other times mix with parties of trappers and decoy

them to their ruin. I have done murder myself, but what of that? I alone can bear the punishment of my crimes.

"One day I met my brother in St. Louis, where he had removed, and he had a child with him—a daughter six years old. I saw that he was happy in that child and she was the picture of the woman I loved so well. The thought came into my heart that I would steal that child, and I did it. With some of my men we stopped his carriage in the very streets of St. Louis, at night, and stole the little girl. I carried her to a frontier city and left her there to be educated. You understand me, Azalia? You are not my daughter, but the child of my brother Phillip. I am Giles Raymond, the outlaw."

"And you murdered my father," moaned Azalia. "You whom I have loved!"

"It was one of my men," replied the outlaw, faintly. "I sent my brother word by a sure hand, that I had the child, and that she should never see him—that she should be trained up to curse his very name. The man betrayed me, and told him, for money, where I was concealed, and he came upon the search. That was three years ago, when Azalia was still in school. She was there when her father was killed, in a quarrel with myself and another man, in Granger's valley. I knew, by the persistent way in which Gid Granger followed me that Phillip had told him the story, and that he was determined to seek the proofs of Azalia's birth and take her from me. I was not afraid of his succeeding, and, for Azalia's sake, I let him live, to keep the grave of Phillip green. When Brian Malcom came here I saw that, girl like, she was taken by his handsome face, and I determined to brush him out of the way as I had done many others. But, the fate which governs all things had decreed that I should die here. When I am dead, go to Lawyer James Martin, in St. Louis, where you will find papers which will prove Azalia's identity, and make her the richest woman in Missouri. It grows dark. I have sinned deeply, and for me there is no atonement."

He raised himself with a wild stare upon the hard bed. "I see them all about me," he gasped—"Phillip and the rest. The devil claims his own. Oh!"

With that gasp his life went out. A word will explain all. On his return, after placing the old mountaineer in the pit, he had got into a quarrel with some of his men who were tired of their bad life, and, in the mêlée which followed, was fatally stabbed. The better portion of the band at once set upon and captured the rest of his closest friends and bound them.

"What's that pesky boy that come to my camp?" said Gid. "Drat him, I hope no harm hez come to the little cuss."

It was after the burial of Markham, when the prisoners had been sent away to go where they liked, and only half a dozen of the best, with Ned, the Growler, as their leader, remained to convoy Azalia safely to the settlements. Azalia laughed, and said she would find him. She went into one of the huts, and shortly after the boy came out of the same place, and walked up to Gid.

"Now, I'll shoot that match with you, Gid Granger," he said. Gid uttered a perfect war-whoop, and started back in astonishment. Azalia, with the brown eye washed from her face, could not be mistaken for another. It was she who had come to the rancho to warn them of their danger, and now stood smiling before them in her Zouave garb. Brian laughed at the surprise of his old friend, and caught Azalia's hands in his, while the men prudently looked another way.

Next day they marched away and crossed the wide prairie, and, escaping all the dangers of the West, safely reached the settlements. Here Gid Granger bade them good-by, resisting their entreaties to come to St. Louis with them and share their home.

"I couldn't do it, little 'uns," he said. "In the mountains I have lived, in the mountains I must die, and some one must stay in my ranch to keep the grass green and smooth. Good-by to you. I'm off for the Nor-west ag'in."

Ned, the Growler, who had conceived a strong attachment for Gid, went back with him, while Brian and Azalia, who were married in the settlement, went on toward the Mississippi, where they claimed the estates which Azalia's father had left. The papers in the attorney's hands proved the identity of Azalia and they found a will leaving all the property of Gid

Raymond to her. It was greater than they had supposed and with it Brian endowed an institution of charity, and the money so wickedly obtained worked a good end at last.

Still, at the hunters' fire in the North-west, Gid Grauger and his faithful friend, Ned the Growler, are known, and Gid's strange tales make him Prince of Mountaineers and story-tellers. Once he came to St. Louis and spent a happy week in the society of Brian and Azalia, and was a faithful friend to their little child, whom they had taught to love him. But, he could not live long in the city, and again went back to the boundless West. The band of Giles Markham only lives in story since his day, when it lost its master-mind.

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